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# HOME CINEMA Choice

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## EDITORIAL TEAM

**Editor** Mark Craven  
mark.craven@homecinemachoice.com  
**Deputy Editor** Anton van Beek  
anton.vanbeek@homecinemachoice.com  
**Art Editor** John Rook

## CONTRIBUTORS

Steve May, John Archer, Tekura Maeva, Jon Thompson,  
Rik Henderson, Ed Selley, Richard Stevenson,  
Martin Pipe, Martin Dew  
**Photography** Mike Prior

## ADVERTISING

**Advertising Sales Executive** Ben Foster  
Tel: 01366 728488  
E-mail: ben@hillviewmedia.com

**Advertising Sales Executive** Keith Foster  
Tel: 01366 728488  
E-mail: keith@hillviewmedia.com

## MARKETING AND SUBSCRIPTIONS

**UK:** New, Renewals and Enquiries  
Tel: 0344 243 9023  
E-mail: help@hcc.secureorder.co.uk  
**USA & CANADA:**  
Toll Free: 001 866 647 9191  
**REST OF WORLD:** New, Renewals and Enquiries  
Tel: +44 (0) 1604 828 748  
**BACK ISSUES**  
www.mags-uk.com

## MANAGEMENT TEAM

**Group Editor** Paul Miller, paul.miller@avtechmedia.co.uk  
**Group Sales Manager** Rhona Bolger  
**Subscriptions Manager** Kate Hall  
**Chief Executive** Owen Davies  
**Chairman** Peter Harkness

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Suite 25, Eden House, Enterprise Way  
Edenbridge, Kent, TN8 6HF  
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NEXT ISSUE ON SALE: November 30, 2017



4K Blu-ray sees the Spielberg light, p104

# Welcome

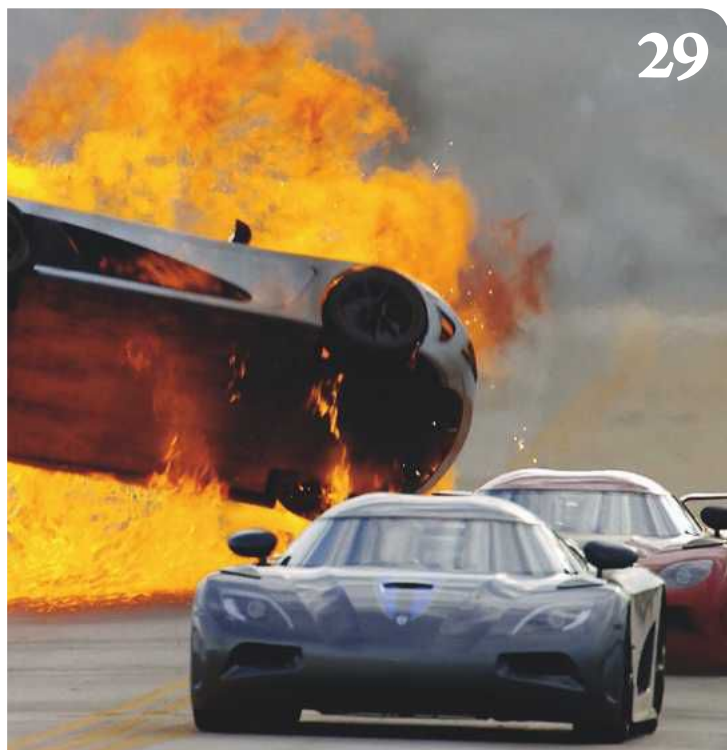
It says a lot about the enduring legacy of director Steven Spielberg that two of the most hotly anticipated Ultra HD Blu-ray releases so far are for two of his movies. The good news is that 1977's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and 1982's *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*, both reviewed this issue, look resplendent in 4K HDR. Most importantly, they look like films. **I've nothing against modern-day digital features that are shiny and slick**, and if I was demo'ing 4K to someone I'd start with something like *Transformers: The Last Knight* (p94) rather than *E.T.* But the tech tools now available to movie studios are dangerous things, capable of making vintage flicks resemble newer creations. Go too far with grain reduction and digital filters, and you can rob a classic movie of the very visual aesthetic that may have made it a classic in the first place. Put another way, when *Jaws* arrives on 4K BD, I want the shark to look fake.



**Mark Craven**  
Editor



# MENU



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## CONTRIBUTORS



**John Archer:**  
The UK's most experienced TV tester cut his teeth as an early HCC staffer



**Jon Thompson:**  
Film producer and post-production expert delves deep into Hollywood and AV



**Steve May:**  
HCC's former Editor-in-Chief is one of the UK's most respected AV journo



**Martin Pipe:**  
Technical expert Martin is renowned throughout the home cinema industry



**Richard Stevenson:**  
Industry veteran and former Editor of UK CE trade journal ERT



**Danny Phillips:**  
A former editor of *What Video* magazine, now a certified home cinema audio buff

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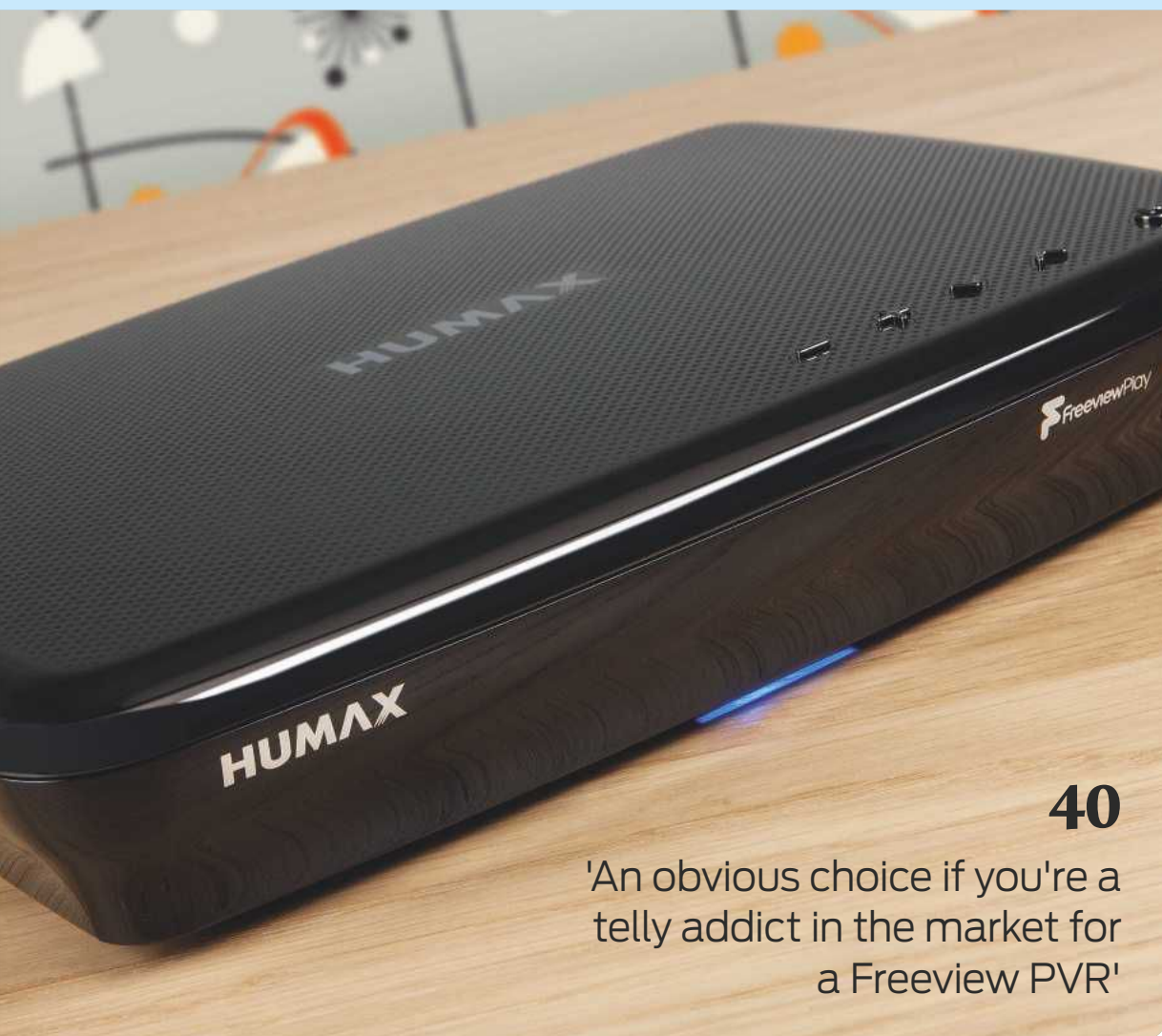
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# BULLETIN

→ **NEWS HIGHLIGHTS** JVC High-end Exofield headphones have the personal touch  
**WILSON AUDIO** 'The most realistic-sounding loudspeaker on the planet'? **POLK** Budget soundbar  
 breaks cover **WEBWATCH** Click here for trailers, tech **NEWS X10** The hottest news stories in  
 bite-sized chunks **ATOMIC BLONDE** Charlize Theron is trigger happy in 4K **& MORE!**

## DLP 4K's bright idea

Acer VL7860 → [www.acer.com](http://www.acer.com)

Acer is following the release of its debut lamp-based Ultra HD projectors with a laser model, the VL7860, which it bills as the world's smallest 4K laser beamer.

As with the rest of Acer's UHD stable, Texas Instruments' XPR solution delivers the 3,840 x 2,160 visuals, in conjunction with HDR compatibility, colour mapping of REC.2020 content, 3,000 Lumens brightness rating and AcuMotion processing.

The PJ offers a cool silver/white aesthetic, 1.6x zoom, ISF-friendly tweaking tools and a lamp life of 30,000 hours. It's available now, priced around £3,500.



### HCC ONLINE...

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# Going it alone

Polk Audio Signa Solo → [www.polkaudio.com](http://www.polkaudio.com)

When your TV's audio needs a helping hand and space (and money) is tight, Polk's new Signa Solo might be the answer. This £150 soundbar ships without an additional subwoofer for a single-box solution, using a quartet of full-range drivers to deliver a performance that the brand claims goes 'far beyond its price tag.' Hookup to your flatscreen is via optical digital audio input; Dolby Digital decoding, Bluetooth connection, preset EQ settings and a Voice Adjust mode for user-defined dialogue enhancement are on the feature list.





## B&W cuts cord, says 'shhhh'



B&W has launched its first ever set of wireless noise-cancelling 'phones. The PX (£330) are available in Space

Grey or Soft Gold (pictured) finishes and intend to be a high-performance partner for your playing hardware. Neat features including intelligent operation (lift a cup off your ear and they will pause your music, for instance), three user selectable levels of noise-cancelling, and a claimed 22-hour wireless battery life. The 40mm drivers are filtered down from B&W's P9 flagship cans. [www.bowers-wilkins.co.uk](http://www.bowers-wilkins.co.uk)

## SACD ain't dead yet, apparently



Hitting stores with a £2,000 ticket, the PD-70AE is Pioneer's top-flight music spinner, offering Super

Audio CD/CD playback and standalone hi-res DAC functionality via its digital inputs. Tinkerers will appreciate its three-stage digital filter, which can alter its sound signature between 'sharp', 'slow' and 'short' modes. Balanced XLR stereo output, die-cast aluminium disc tray and a chassis weighing in at 18.5kg add to the premium audiophile vibe.

[www.pioneer-audiovisual.eu](http://www.pioneer-audiovisual.eu)

# Tuning the wireless

Dynaudio multiroom Music system wants to adapt to your home

Dynaudio has announced its first wireless multiroom music system which, it claims, will automatically learn 'your tastes, your home and your lifestyle'. Each of the four 'Music' speakers, with Class D amplification and proprietary MSP cone material drivers, offer one-touch simplicity, and can adapt automatically to a room or position, while monitoring surrounding noise levels to optimise audio output in any given situation.

The speaker range incorporates Dynaudio's homespun Music Now app for iOS and Android, which learns a user's musical tastes and delivers personalised playlists with the touch of any one of five presets. These can be programmed to connect to any source accessible from the app, including internet radio stations, TIDAL and Spotify. All the speakers also stream via Wi-Fi, Spotify Connect, aptX Bluetooth and Apple AirPlay, and can access DLNA devices.

Built-in RoomAdapt technology, says Dynaudio, will sense where a speaker is placed in a room – for example, in a corner or against a wall – and tweak performance to deliver what the company claims to be 'the best sound possible'. Meanwhile, NoiseAdapt tech aims to adjust volume and tone as ambient noise in a room alters. It 'isn't simply a loudness control', says the Danish corp.

The speakers are available in four flavours: Music 1 (£450, 4in woofer, 1in soft-dome tweeter, 80W amp); Music 2 (£575, 5in woofer, 1in tweeter, 120W); Music 3 (£700, 5in woofer, 2 x 3in midrange, 1in tweeter, 250W); and Music 7 (£875, 2 x 5in woofers, 2 x 3in midrange, 2 x 1in tweeters, 300W).



Dynaudio's Music multiroom speakers offer real-time EQ

The latter two models are mains-powered only; the Music 7 includes HDMI with ARC to double up as a soundbar. All units have USB ports for iOS audio and charging iOS devices, and can accept 3.5mm analogue inputs.

A hands-on session, set up by UK distributor Exertis Unlimited, impressed – not only in terms of sonic performance but aesthetically too. All sport rugged, angular designs, and neat cloth finishes (in grey, red or blue).

## Black blocks

Also being handled by Exertis is Astell&Kern's new MKII version of its AK70 portable hi-res music player. Selling for £600, this offers improvements over its MKI predecessor (still available at £500) including a dual DAC design (24-bit/192kHz-compatible), boosted amplification and a claimed reduction in jitter, without a huge increase in size or weight. The 64GB internal storage capacity can be expanded via microSD slot; the player can also be used as a USB DAC.



A&K's AK70 MkII

## Playlist...

Team HCC spins up its disc picks of the month

### Blade Runner: The Final Cut (Ultra HD BD)

Ridley Scott's sci-fi masterpiece looks so good in 4K that you can almost overlook the loss of some truly brilliant bonus features.



### The Terminator (All-region BD)



With T2 making its 4K debut this month (see p96) we had to revisit the superb BD restoration of James Cameron's original film.

### Get Out (Ultra HD BD)



A new DTS:X soundtrack ensures that this delayed 4K outing for Jordan Peele's acclaimed horror is a worthwhile upgrade.

### Riviera: Season One (All-region Blu-ray)



This HD release of the glossy (and gloriously trashy) series makes the most of its exotic locales.

### Blood Feast (All-region Blu-ray)



A welcome standalone release of the splatter classic for those who missed Arrow's bumper boxset.

## At the 'plex...

Heading out to see a flick?  
Catch these this month

### Murder on the Orient Express

November 03: Kenneth Branagh directs and stars as Hercule Poirot in this adaptation of the classic Agatha Christie whodunnit. Also along for the ride are Johnny Depp, Judi Dench, Penélope Cruz, Daisy Ridley and Michelle Pfeiffer.

### Paddington 2



November 10: The marmalade-loving ursine is on the trail of a thief who stole a rare pop-up book in this hotly-anticipated sequel, which will no doubt prove just as big a hit as its 2014 predecessor.

### Justice League



November 17: DC's answer to Marvel's *Avengers* is finally here, bringing together Batman, Wonder Woman, Flash, Aquaman and Cyborg to save the world from an alien army. *Batman Vs Superman* director Zack Snyder is again behind the camera.

# JVC aims for audio utopia

Exofield localisation soundfield processing tech is VR for the ears

What if you could recreate the listening environment of a world-famous music studio whenever you donned headphones? That's the premise of JVC's new Exofield out-of-head localisation soundfield processing technology.

High-end audiophiles in Japan will be the first to have access to the innovation. For an all-in cost of around £8,000, they will get handcrafted headphones able to replicate the sonic characteristics of JVC's famous Victor Studio.

A similar service is anticipated to launch in the UK and Europe in 2018, in partnership with an as-yet unconfirmed recording studio. *HCC* was invited to trial an early version of the technology at the listening rooms of luxury AV retailer Cornflake. We had our ears measured, then partnered with headphones calibrated to replicate the sound of free-standing speakers in the Cornflake listening room... and the results were remarkable.

With conventional headphones, sonic images localise in your head, but JVC is attempting to reproduce the natural soundfield of actual speakers. The technique puts a tangible distance between the music and your ears.

'Our technology creates the optimal soundfield for each user,' explains Hiroyuki Sato, senior manager of JVC's VR Business Development Office.

But it's not just for music and movies. 'We believe there's an opportunity to bring Exofield soundfield technology to virtual reality too,' he adds. 'Perhaps to recreate a live event.'



**Hiroyuki Sato:** 'We could build the Exofield technology into a headphone preamp. We'll see what the market demands'

Our demo was stereophonic, but JVC says Exofield algorithms can be applied to multichannel content.

The prospect of listening to a movie using headphones, yet hearing the same as a director in the mixing suite, is moving tantalisingly closer.

## App for audiophiles?

The Exofield process involves inserting measurement microphones into each ear, and then calibrating with a series of chirps and cheeps. It measures both the characteristics of the ear canal, and the listening room and speakers within. The tech can be applied to both open-back and closed-back headphones. The catch is music has to be played through an Exofield smartphone app. Sato-san admits that audiophiles may not want to listen to music from

a 'phone. 'We could build the technology into a headphone preamp,' he says. 'We'll see what the market demands.'

In Japan, those who buy into the Exofield experience get a pair of premium JVC HA-WM90 headphones, plus a portable headphone amp, in a luxury presentation case. Two Exofield options are available, one measured in the JVC Victor Studio with floorstanding speakers, the other in a mixing suite with near-field monitors.



**JVC's Exofield technology requires in-ear calibration**

# Q Acoustics' 5.1 pack goes slim

Sub/sat system to ship with new, easier-to-accommodate subwoofer

**Q Acoustics' 7000i 5.1 pack now sports a newly designed subwoofer to make it even more suited to living room setups.**

Making bass waves in the 7000i 5.1 Slim is the 7060S, an active subwoofer using an 8in driver paired to a 150W Class D amplifier. It's 25 per cent slimmer than the previous 7000Si, while frequency response remains rated down to 35Hz.

The rest of the system is unchanged, meaning buyers get a quartet of Q Acoustics' 7000LRi satellite speakers and the 7000Ci centre channel model, all armed with a pair of 3in midbass drivers and a 1in tweeter, and

featuring a table-top stand that doubles up as a wall-mount.

Pricing is £1,000 approx, with finish options of black or white. Those looking for a 7.1 installation can buy an additional pair of 7000LRis for around £225.

Q Acoustics is also shipping the slender subwoofer with its M7 2.1 system, built around the 2 x 50W, Bluetooth-capable AVA stereo amplifier. [www.qacoustics.co.uk](http://www.qacoustics.co.uk)

**Q Acoustics' 7000i system, now called 'Slim'...**





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## Extras...

Small items that could make a big impression...

### Kim Newman's Video Dungeon: The Collected Reviews



This hefty £15 tome from the noted film critic collects together more than 500 of his insightful and enjoyable B-movie

reviews, split into sections as diverse as 'Hard Case Crime' and 'Weird Hippie Sh\*t'. Fun and fascinating in equal measure, the book is a celebration of frequently overlooked films and, if nothing else, makes you realise just how many Dracula and Frankenstein movies have been made...

### John Carpenter: Anthology (1974-1978)



Following two volumes of original 'lost themes', filmmaker

and composer John Carpenter has revisited the scores from 13 of his films for this latest album. Featuring newly recorded versions of tracks from the likes of *Assault on Precinct 13*, *The Fog* and *Big Trouble in Little China*, it's already on constant rotation in the HCC office and is a must for fans.

### The Frightfest Guide to Monster Movies



Genre critic and editor Michael Gingold is your informed guide to the world of monster movies in this

lavishly illustrated paperback. Priced £17, the book covers 200 memorable creature-features from around the world, from the 1920 German silent film *The Golem: How He Came into the World* to this year's Hollywood blockbuster *Kong: Skull Island*.

# Cello TVs put audio first

British TV manufacturer integrates soundbars on budget UHD panels



If you haven't yet heard of Cello, that might be about to change. The British TV manufacturer intends to make a big noise about its new line of flatscreens, which boast an integrated soundbar.

The Platinum range incorporates both HD and 4K models, and takes its name from the screens' distinctive silver-effect bezels. All employ an early iteration (v4.2) of the Android smart platform. Available streaming apps include Netflix, YouTube, BBC iPlayer, ITV Hub, All4 and Demand 5.

Cello is known for its aggressive pricing. The Platinum range starts with a 32in HD set (yours for £300), and ratchets up through 43in (£450), 50in (£600), 55in (£680) and 65in (£980) screen sizes. All models from 50in upwards use 4K UHD panels. They are not HDR compatible, however.

A unifying feature of the range is a forward-facing multi-speaker array; four drivers are used in the smallest model, and up to six in the larger sets.

Brian Palmer, Cello's CEO, told *HCC* that despite huge sales of soundbars and soundbases there was still a demand for better out-the-box audio from TVs. 'Consumers have left me in no doubt over the years that they are dissatisfied with sound on all brands of LED TVs. We've designed our Platinum range to knock spots off the competition.'

At a preview onboard the HMS Belfast, the new Cello sets competed in a sound-off with comparably priced models from Samsung and JVC, and – with the help of a looping Katy Perry video – easily outperformed their rivals.

The brand also showcased the C75ANSMT-4K, a huge 75in flatscreen. Priced at £1,900, and available in



**Brian Palmer:** 'Consumers have left me in no doubt over the years that they are dissatisfied with sound on all LED TVs'

black or silver, it's (probably) the cheapest mega-sized 4K TV currently available in the UK.

The Platinum line represents a definite step-up for the TV maker, which has previously supplied rather anonymous screens to mail-order catalogues.

## Let's take it outside

As touched upon in our *Bulletin* pages last month, Cello also has an eye on the away-from-home TV market. Two recently launched battery-powered screens are designed for use perhaps in the garden or on a camping trip, and claim a battery life of up to 10 hours. They sport terrestrial and satellite tuners, but for off-the-grid viewing there's a USB input and media player. USB ports can even power an LED light bulb (helpful in a tent), or charge a mobile phone. These 22in and 32in screens are a niche product, admits Palmer, but he believes the demand is there. 'Our battery TV range was built with portability front of mind, to make sure those on the move never had to compromise on the quality of their viewing experience.'

Cello prides itself on being the last British TV manufacturer standing, and assembles all its sets on production lines at its factory in Bishop Auckland in County Durham. If you plan on visiting, take some biscuits. 'We like to stop for a pot of tea,' confides Palmer.





## This month's top 10 news stories in handy, bite-sized chunks...



### 1 Portable speaker + TV remote

Sony has released a handy gadget that could be a boon for telly addicts with hearing difficulties. Designed to be placed next to the listener and not disturb other people in the same room, the £170 Wireless Handy TV Speaker (SRS-LSR100) streams TV audio via a dock – and battery charger – that connects to your screen's optical or headphone output, and claims to bolster dialogue intelligibility with 'Voice Zoom' tech. The speaker's top panel doubles as a remote control with most common functions. Sony says it's compatible with 'virtually all modern TVs'.

### 2 Sky speaks up

Sky Q's Voice Control functionality has been given a boost with the satcaster's latest software update. Users can now change channels and play shows (not just search for them), as well as being able to alter accessibility settings, such as audio description, by voice alone.

### 3 Netflix price hike

The cost of a Netflix subscription is on the rise. While the Basic tier remains £6 per month, the price of the Standard (HD) tier has risen 50p to £8 per month and Premium (4K) has gone up by a quid to £10 a month. Prices have also increased in other territories, including the US.

### 4 Fear of the future

Do you live in fear of artificial intelligence? Well, you're not alone. Research undertaken on behalf of MoneySuperMarket claims that 76 per cent of Brits are 'fearful' of the smart home concept – although digging into the results, this has more to do with unapproved data collection, hackers and viruses than any possible robot uprisings.

### 5 Video nasty unleashed

Some good news for gore fans: 39 years after it hit cinemas, the BBFC has finally passed notorious 1978 lo-fi shocker *The Toolbox Murders* uncut for home media release in the UK. The full-length version of the film makes its Blu-ray debut on these shores as part of 88 Film's 'Slasher Classics Collection' lineup on November 20.

### 6 Pirates locked up for longer

Continuing its battle against online piracy, October saw the UK government change the sentencing rules for online copyright infringement. The maximum sentence has risen from two years to 10 years – bringing it in line with the laws regarding physical copyright infringement.

### 7 Movie magic

William Friedkin's cult thriller *Sorcerer* has been celebrating its 40th anniversary this month with a bigscreen re-release courtesy of EntertainmentOne. Fans of the film can also look forward to a UK Blu-ray arriving from the distributor on November 6, which will also feature a 74-minute conversation between Friedkin and Nicolas Winding Refn about the film's troubled production and its calamitous original release.

### 8 4K streaming price drop

While 4K BDs may not be dropping in price any time soon, the same can't be said of the cost of streaming UHD films. After Apple launched its 4K iTunes service with HD pricing, Amazon has followed suit, cutting the cost of some digital UHD movie purchases to as little as £4.

### 9 Correction corner

In our review of Hisense's H65N6800 TV in the last issue, we described it as an 8-bit panel, when it actually uses an 8-bit+FRC (Frame Rate Correction) panel. Also, Hisense would like to point out that the Amazon HDR and catchup TV firmware update has now gone live.

### 10 Driven to succeed

Following a collaboration last year, KEF and Porsche Design have put together a new set of headphones. Combining active noise-cancelling technology with Bluetooth aptX connectivity and a 30-hour battery life, the £350 Space One Wireless also feature a high-gloss Porsche Design logo inlaid in each earcup. Under the hood are 40mm full-range drivers with neodymium magnets; KEF and Porsche Design promise a 'crisp, spacious and highly dynamic' sound.



## Premiere...

What's happening in the world of TV and films...

### Wedding plans on hold



Universal has halted pre-production on its *Bride of Frankenstein* remake following the disastrous reception that greeted its first Dark Universe movie, *The Mummy*. Cameras were due to start rolling in the New Year for a February 2019 release, but this has been delayed while the studio does additional work on the script.

### Gore for Gambit?

Gore Verbinski is in talks to helm the stalled *X-Men* spin-off *Gambit*. Previous directors attached to the on-again, off-again project include Doug 'Edge of Tomorrow' Liman and Rupert 'Rise of the Planet of the Apes' Wyatt. Despite the delays, Channing Tatum is still set to star as the film's titular mutant hero.

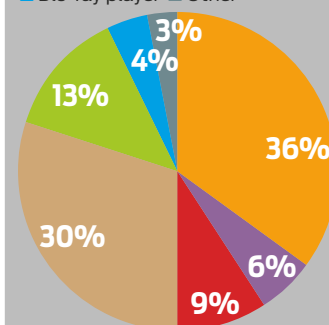
### Avatar sequel update

Kate Winslet is re-teaming with her *Titanic* director James Cameron after landing a role in the *Avatar* sequels. Filming on the four movies officially started in late September, with the first scheduled to arrive in cinemas on December 18, 2020.

## We asked...

### Which part of your home cinema system did you last upgrade?

TV Projector Speakers  
AV receiver/amp Subwoofer  
Blu-ray player Other



Results from [www.homecinemachoice.com](http://www.homecinemachoice.com)  
Go online for more polling action

# Blondes have more fun...

Atomic Blonde → Universal Pictures  
→ DVD/Blu-ray/Ultra HD Blu-ray

Following her star turns in *Mad Max: Fury Road* and *Fast & Furious 8*, Charlize Theron continues her transformation into the queen of action cinema with this wild and stylish spy thriller from one half of the directing duo responsible for *John Wick*. Making its UK disc debut on December 11, *Atomic Blonde* hits Blu-ray and 4K BD with a DTS:X soundtrack, plus some choice bonus goodies including a director's commentary, deleted scenes, two sets of 'motion storyboards' and four behind-the-scenes featurettes.





# Hygge.

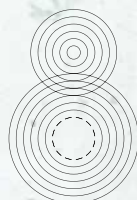
Who says it needs to be all about lamps and couches?

**“What are you doing for your 40th birthday?”**, everyone asked. We thought about it and decided that since we aren't wild about lavish cakes (although we do love a tasty fastelavnsbolle), we'd celebrate a little differently. Even the *thought* of making new speakers makes us warm and fuzzy, so that's what we chose to do.

## Meet the Special Forty: hygge for your ears.

Laurels aren't for resting on, which is why we gave Dynaudio Labs free rein to play. (It gave our accountants a heart attack.) Our only instruction: take our classic tech and see what you'd do differently this time. Their design was nothing short of genius.

They took our classic Esotar 28mm soft-dome tweeter design, put our DSR\* precision coating on it, and then **machined an aerodynamic vent** directly into the powerful neodymium magnet. Then they added more damping material and another pressure-release conduit. Take it apart and look behind it: it's a work of art (except please don't; we spent ages putting it together).



*We made the drivers' frequencies overlap so we could keep the first-order crossover simple. After all, why add things that might affect the signal if you don't have to?*

**We called the new tweeter the Esotar Forty**, and it's exclusive to this speaker.

We also gave the Special Forty a new woofer, made from our own super-stable Magnesium Silicate

Polymer. Its dome is coupled directly to the voice-coil for incredibly precise midrange performance. That's aided by the **new AirFlow Basket** – an aerodynamically shaped chassis that optimises rear airflow and isolates the driver from unwanted vibrations and resonances.

The woofer also has a **custom magnetic field** – one we created in the lab – thanks to a unique hybrid magnet system. It's part ferrite, part neodymium, and it physically manipulates flux to bend it around the voice-coil for greater power and efficiency.



*The magnet sits inside the voice-coil (others put it outside). That lets us beam its energy to where we want it to go – not where it wants to go.*

Those innovations mean the tweeter can reach down to 1000Hz, and the woofer up to 4000Hz. That overlap means smoother integration between treble and bass, and **performance that borders on mesmerising**.

We don't want to bore you with the maths, so here's the English: the extra air movement and flux containment means we have more control over how the tweeter and woofer move. And that means **a more detailed, precise and honest performance**. Just what we (and you) want.

This is a simple-looking speaker. Sure. But wait until you see its Grey Birch High Gloss and Red Birch High Gloss finishes. We painstakingly laminate Finnish Birch veneers many, many, *many* times and cross-cut

them to achieve this striking pattern. Then we use special stains to bring it out even further. Nice, isn't it.



*The biggest decision you'll make today: Red Birch High Gloss or Grey Birch High Gloss? (Or just get one of each. You know it makes sense.)*

## We want to know what you think.

Join our Special Forty group and together we'll take our technology to the next level. That's right: you can be actively involved in shaping the future of our R&D. And you might even find your idea making it into our next-generation speakers. There's a fastelavnsbolle – and warm feelings of hygge – in it for you if you do.

[www.dynaud.io/SpecialFortyForum](http://www.dynaud.io/SpecialFortyForum)

**Special occasion.  
Special speaker.  
Special Forty.**



\*Wondering what 'DSR' stands for? It's Dynaudio Secret Recipe. And that's all you're getting out of us – apart from a fantastic tweeter, of course.

## Face to Face

Topics of discussion on the HCC Facebook page

### On the *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* trailer...



Booked for the BFI IMAX. It's a shame it's not 70/15 but as I missed *The Force Awakens* in IMAX I needed to see it there.  
**Mike Wadkins**

Hope it's better than the last one.  
**Dan Mann**

Looks like it's not going to disappoint! Phantom Who?!  
**Robert Corrigan**

I think it's shaping up to be a great movie. My only concern – Luke seems to be a bit of a wuss.  
**Jeffrey McCann**

### What you're watching on your home cinema...



*Wonder Woman* 4K tonight! Let's hope the reviews were right!  
**Martin Evans**

I'm going classic... *Lawrence of Arabia*.  
**Noel Glynn**

*Baby Driver* = loved it.  
**Paul Snappy Matthews**

*Resident Evil: Retribution* in 3D. Awesome! Pity *The Final Chapter* was such a disaster in every way!  
**Theo Coetzee**

I imported *Transformers: The Last Knight* as I couldn't wait a month for us to get it so maybe that again. The pic quality of the 4K is outstanding!  
**Stewart Heed**

I watched *Blade Runner: The Final Cut* UHD Blu-ray which was stunning for a 35-year-old movie! Next up is *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Men Tell No Tales* in 4K!  
**Mark Edwards**

*The Rock*.  
**Sean D Dobson**



**Join in the fun**

Like our page at facebook.com/HomeCinemaChoice

# Back of the 'net

Trailers, technology and more to check out on the web



## Fight club

2013's *Pacific Rim* is a home cinema favourite, so next year's sequel has a lot to live up to. Judging from Universal's first trailer, *Pacific Rim Uprising* (in cinemas in March) will offer a fresh cast, a new army of Mechs and copious sequences of largescale destruction. As expected, really.  
[youtu.be/207UxXSnHZE](https://youtu.be/207UxXSnHZE)



## If you Bild it...

Luxury AV brand Loewe has been drip-feeding its new Bild range of OLED screens throughout the year, and has now confirmed its entry-level Bild 3 (55in, 4K, Dolby Vision) will sell for an appetizing £2,800. The Bild 3 line also includes HDR10-compatible 43in and 49in UHD sets, but these use LCD panels.  
[www.loewe.tv](http://www.loewe.tv)



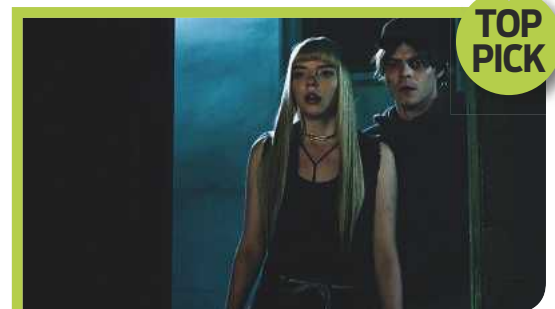
## Let's try that again

Two previous Tomb Raider flicks from Paramount didn't quite set the movie world alight, but that hasn't stopped Warner Bros trying its luck with next year's outing starring Alicia Vikander as the brainiac archaeologist. This first trailer shows we're in origin story territory, with plenty of SFX-fuelled action.  
[youtu.be/8ndhidEmUbl](https://youtu.be/8ndhidEmUbl)



## Focusing on Atmos

Focal's Sib Evo Dolby Atmos 5.1 pack (reviewed in HCC #276) is selling exclusively in Sevenoaks Sound & Vision stores until the end of the year, and the retailer has announced add-on 2.0.2 packs (two of the Atmos-upfiring, but also front-firing, Sib Evo speakers) can be bought for £450.  
[www.sevenoakssoundandvision.co.uk](http://www.sevenoakssoundandvision.co.uk)



**TOP PICK**

## Spin-off in a new direction

Fox's *X-Men* franchise rolls on and – following last year's adult-friendly *Logan* – it's heading down an even darker path with *The New Mutants*, a horror-tinged spin-off apparently inspired by the works of Stephen King and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* 3. We're intrigued. Here's the trailer.  
[youtu.be/bu9e410C\\_I](https://youtu.be/bu9e410C_I)



## Got that Friday feeling

Bored of waiting for another *Friday 13th* movie? Then check out this 55-minute fan film, dubbed *Never Hike Alone*, from Womp Stomp Films, which manages to eke out heaps of action and suspense from its simple premise and smallscale cast. Possibly more enjoyable than *...Jason Takes Manhattan*.  
[youtu.be/7K\\_wkQSM8xM](https://youtu.be/7K_wkQSM8xM)



# Time machine

Wilson Audio WAMM Master Chronosonic → [www.absolutesounds.com](http://www.absolutesounds.com)

Billed as 'the most realistic-sounding loudspeaker on the planet', while looking a little like something from outer space, Wilson Audio's WAMM Master Chronosonic is a two-metre titan selling for £700,000 a pair. That monster outlay gets you a nine-driver floorstander including 10in and 12in woofers and adjustable mid-range modules for bespoke time alignment, plus a multipart cabinet crafted to the nanometre to eliminate vibrations and resonances. Only seventy pairs will be made, so you better get your chequebook out quick...



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**CODE V1228**

# Dream theatres

Each year the **CEDIA Awards** showcase the astonishing work of custom installers from the industry body's EMEA region – and 2017 has seen a triple-victory for UK companies in the Best Home Cinema categories. Check out these picture palaces, plus award-winning media rooms and more, to get inspiration for your own home cinema...





## ◀ Best home cinema £40,000-£120,000

Winner: **The Pyramid Group**

Described as 'technically perfect' by the CEDIA judging panel, this six-seat cinema room required some extensive system planning (and work with Dolby in the US) to ensure its angled ceiling (it's a top-storey space) didn't get in the way of its 9.1.6 Dolby Atmos speaker array.

With that groundwork complete, it was time for UK install outfit The Pyramid Group to spec the room with a kit-list that reads like an AV-Holic's dream. A huge 130in, 2.37:1 ratio Screen Excellence screen is paired with a Sony VPL-VW520ES projector, itself fed native 4K content from an Oppo Ultra HD Blu-ray player. On the audio side, Trinnov's high-spec Altitude32 processor has the brainpower to map movie soundmixes to the room's plethora of Artcoustic speakers, with power coming from Rotel amplifiers.

A Control4 system is installed (with touchscreen controller) to handle cinema hardware operation and the room's lighting, meaning the owner (described as a 'self-confessed movie fanatic') doesn't have to move from his chosen spot in the Front Row cinema chairs.

[www.thepyramidgroup.co.uk](http://www.thepyramidgroup.co.uk)







## ◀ Best Home Cinema £40,000 and under

Winner: **Philharmonic AV**

Scooping the entry-level cinema award this year is UK installer Philharmonic AV for a 4K-capable theatre. A basement conversion, key amongst the owner's aims was to make the best use of the space available – a requirement that resulted in slim-profile speakers (from Artcoustic), and a U-shaped seating arrangement providing space for family and visiting friends.

The audio array is 7.2 (with KEF Q400 subwoofers tucked into the front-wall cabinet) but the room has been pre-wired for a Dolby Atmos upgrade down the line. A Sony VPL-VW300ES projector fires at a fixed-frame 100in Screen Research screen, while delivering power and processing is Denon's AVR-X4200W.

The local source is a Pioneer Blu-ray player, but more (including Sky and Apple TV) can be fed in from a centralised hub that distributes around the house.

[www.philharmonicav.com](http://www.philharmonicav.com)

## ▶ Best Integrated Home £120,000 and under

Highly Commended: **Cyberhomes**

This cinema room previously featured in HCC #274, but it's just one part of a whole-house project from Cyberhomes that has earned the company a Best Integrated Home commendation.

The room itself features an in-wall/on-wall 5.1.4 speaker system using Definitive Technology models, Epson projector, and Integra power and processing hardware. There's seating for seven, but we'd make a beeline for the front row of chaise longues.

The rest of the property is as smart as they come, offering 15 separate audio zones with in-ceiling speakers, a video matrix to shunt content around multiple TVs, and Lutron control over 76 lighting circuits – all integrated into a Control4 system.

[www.cyberhomes.co.uk](http://www.cyberhomes.co.uk)





# CITY HOME CINEMAS

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4K ULTRAHD



Wisdom P4i  
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showroom.



Wisdom L2 Cinema  
surround speakers-  
There are four in our  
Cinema showroom



Datasat RA7300 power amplifier



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Datasat RS20i audio processor

During our days of operating Commercial Cinemas we desired to present films in the best way possible choosing the best 35mm/70mm projectors with top quality anamorphic and backing lenses.

On the sound front we went with Dolby Stereo, together with surround speakers as all other formats had fallen out of favour.

So today, again we seek to create the best cinema environment with the latest 'laser' 4K projection; top of the range sound speakers and processing.

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### ▲ Best Home Cinema £120,000-£240,000

Winner: **Clever Association**

This project occupies a large new-build basement, where its owner demanded an 'authentic cinema experience' and had the budget to match. Clever Association's solution features seating for eight over two rows, Triad in-wall speakers (and in-wall subwoofers) in a 7.2 configuration, a Runco projector with anamorphic lens kit, and lashings of surround sound *nous* from Datasat LS10 and RA7300 separates – naturally, acoustic sound treatments and a full calibration were undertaken. For integrated control, the installers opted for an AMX system with Lutron lighting, all accessible from Apple iPads or wall-mounted keypads.

[www.cleverass.com](http://www.cleverass.com)



### ▲ Best Media Room £20,000-£80,000

Winner: **Life Emotions (Portugal)**

Winning the mid-tier Media Room category is a smart space designed to cater to a simple brief – 'create a cool room to watch football and play music.' Subsequently, the project combines a wall-mounted 75in Sony 4K TV and 2.1 speaker setup (2 x Sonus Faber Veneres, 1 x MartinLogan Dynamo subwoofer), with a separate DJ station that also links into other rooms in the house. To combat initial acoustic problems, Vicoustic diffusion panels were fitted. We particularly like the wall-to-wall storage solution and inviting décor.

[www.life-emotions.pt](http://www.life-emotions.pt)



### ▲ Best Media Room £80,000 and over

Winner: **Synergy Technologies (Pakistan)**

The hardware in this multifunctional space could grace any AV setup. Providing the sonic flair is a 7.1.2 speaker array using models from B&W, including high-end 802 D3 floorstanders on L/R duty and a DB1 subwoofer lurking in the corner. Keeping everything ticking over is McIntosh's premium MX160 processor and MC207 seven-channel power amplifier, with a separate, more potent stereo amp for the 802 D3s. Sources for the fixed 123in PJ screen range from a 4K-capable Kaleidescape server to a Sony PS4 and Google Chromecast.

[www.synergyav.com](http://www.synergyav.com)



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### ▼ Best Media Room £20,000 and under

Winner: **TwentyTwo Integration**

For this surround sound TV den, installer TwentyTwo integration was challenged to fit a system that would integrate with the sleek, wood-panelled aesthetic, but would still deliver the goods. So to blend seamlessly with the in-wall mounted 75in Samsung KS8000 TV, a pair of Leon Profile Pr55 Series speakers were custom-matched to the height of the screen, while a custom in-ceiling soundbar (from James Loudspeaker) handles rear channels. A rack-mounted Marantz AVR, Leon subwoofer, Sony BD deck and Control4 remote complete the job.

[twentytwointegration.com](http://twentytwointegration.com)



### ▼ Best Home Cinema Global

Winner: **DC Home Systems (USA)**

Featuring the largest star ceiling ever produced by manufacturer Kinetics, a reference-grade 3-chip dual-LED 4K projector from Digital Projection with long-throw lens, Trinnov processor, Lumagen Radiance Pro scaler, Triad speakers and a room offering 1,200ft<sup>2</sup> of space, it's safe to say this American custom cinema didn't come cheap. But what else would you expect from a setup judged to be the best in the world? More than twenty guests can relax across its three tiers of seating, grab a drink at the bar, and then head next door to the ten-pin bowling alley...

[www.dchomesystems.com](http://www.dchomesystems.com)



### And the rest More winners from the 2017 CEDIA Awards



#### Best Integrated Home £120,000 and under (1)

Winner: **Brownhen Solutions**

#### Best Integrated Home £120,000-£240,000

Winner: **Archimedia (Dubai)**

#### Best Integrated Home £240,000-£360,000

Winner: **Clearly Automated**

#### Best Integrated Home £360,000 and over

Winner: **NV Integration**

#### Best Integrated Home – Global (2)

Winner: **Land & Sea Entertainment (USA)**



#### Best Innovative Solution

Winner: **Perfect Integration**

Highly Commended: **Clever Association**

#### Best Special Project

Winner: **Clever Association**

#### Best Lighting Control and Installation

Winner: **The Pyramid Group**

Highly Commended: **Teksclusive**

#### Best Auto, Marine and Aircraft Project

Winner: **Luxury Engineering (Russia)**

Highly Commended: **Archimedia (Dubai)**



#### Best Showroom

Winner: **Henri (France)**

#### Best Dressed Rack (3)

Winner: **Henri (France)**

#### Special Recognition

Ian Morrish (Together for Cinema)

#### Best New Hardware

Meridian 218

#### Best New Software (4)

The Cinema Designer

#### Best Trade Supplier

Invision UK

For more info, visit [www.cedia.co.uk](http://www.cedia.co.uk)



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SC LX901 (Dolby  
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# THE 20 BEST MOVIE CAR CHASES

*of the last 20 years*

Ask any film fan for their favourite car chase and they'll likely pick something from the golden era of automobile action – the '60s and '70s, when *The French Connection*, *Bullitt*, *The Italian Job* and *Gone in 60 Seconds* were filling cinemas with stunts and exhaust fumes. Yet the car chase remains a key Hollywood ingredient. Here's **Team HCC's** modern era top 20...>







## 20. Date Night

This sharply scripted comedy has a sharply scripted car chase in the midst of it, as Phil (Steve Carell) and Claire (Tina Fey) evade would-be assassins in a borrowed Audi R8. Or try to, anyway – their getaway is hampered when they collide head-on with a New York taxi and the cars become stuck together. The solution? Carry on driving, pirouetting around corners, scraping parked cars, and narrowly avoiding a police roadblock. It doesn't end well.



## 18. Quantum of Solace

The Bond franchise has seen its fair share of high-octane chases, with this scene-setter from *Quantum of Solace* the pick of the latter-day bunch, and a regular AV demo scene back when it arrived on Blu-ray. A head-to-head between an Aston Martin and an Alfa Romeo that takes in a quarry pit and cliff-edge hairpins, it's short, sharp and will leave you shaken.



## 16. The Raid 2

For his sequel to smash hit *The Raid*, writer/director/editor Gareth Evans lays on a lengthy chase sequence that's notable for some gruesome collisions, impressive stuntwork and an in-car martial arts scrap that sees seat-belts used as weapons. As is usual with Evans, he doesn't fall into the trap of thinking rapid edits are key to successful action, letting the camera linger and his skilful choreography of man and machine do the work.

## 19. Drive

Nicolas Winding Refn's getaway driver thriller mines a similar thematic seam to Walter Hill's *The Driver* – both feature ice-cool wheelmen who's first instinct isn't necessarily to hit the throttle, something made clear from *Drive*'s opening sequence, where our anonymous anti-hero dodges cops by eavesdropping on their movements via his scanner – while catching up with a football game on the radio. Not quite a chase, then, but it's tense and smart. Much like the rest of the movie, actually.



## 17. Wanted

How can they shoot bullets around corners? Why has Angelina Jolie got extra-sensory powers? All is revealed later in the flick – this early sequence from comic book adaptation *Wanted* is simply happy to strap you in for the ride. That means we get Jolie gunning a Dodge Viper SRT-10 through the streets of Chicago, lying over its bonnet wielding a shotgun, and then barrel-rolling it into, and off, a bus, all at a frenetic pace. Some obvious CG shots, but we're not complaining.





## 15. *Baby Driver*

Edgar Wright's stylish crime movie (see p99) sets out its musical ambitions straight away, choreographing every squeal of the tyres and roar of the engine during an opening bank heist getaway to the beat of The Jon Spencer Blues Explosion's *Bellbottoms*. What follows is an astonishing display of driving prowess including one of the slickest drift stunts you'll see as Baby glides his red Subaru WRX around a reversing van in a back-alley.



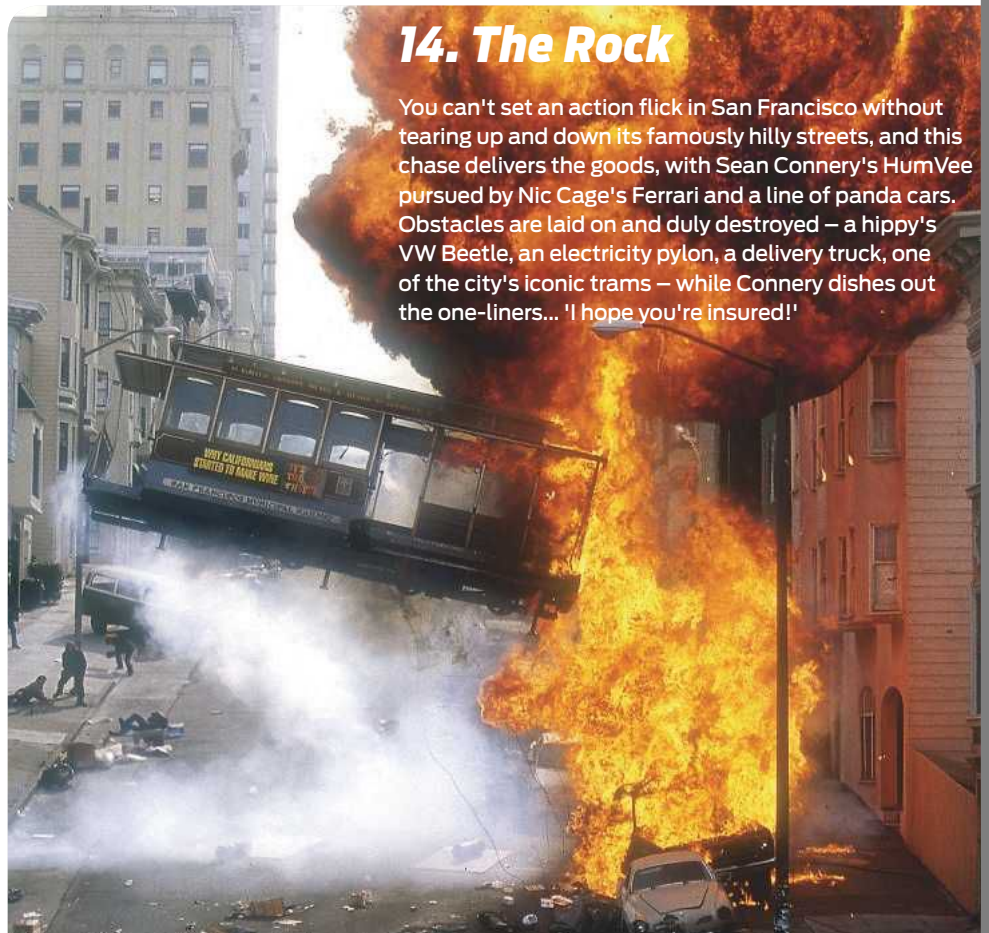
## 13. *The Transporter*

This opening chase, where Jason Statham's hero shows off his precise driving skills through the narrow streets of Nice, is one of many peppered across Luc Besson-scripted movies that mixes up the pedal-to-the-metal action with a wry sense of humour. This begins serenely enough, but once Statham's delivery guy has jumped his BMW onto the trailer of a passing truck, you know *The Transporter* is a movie with its tongue in its cheek.



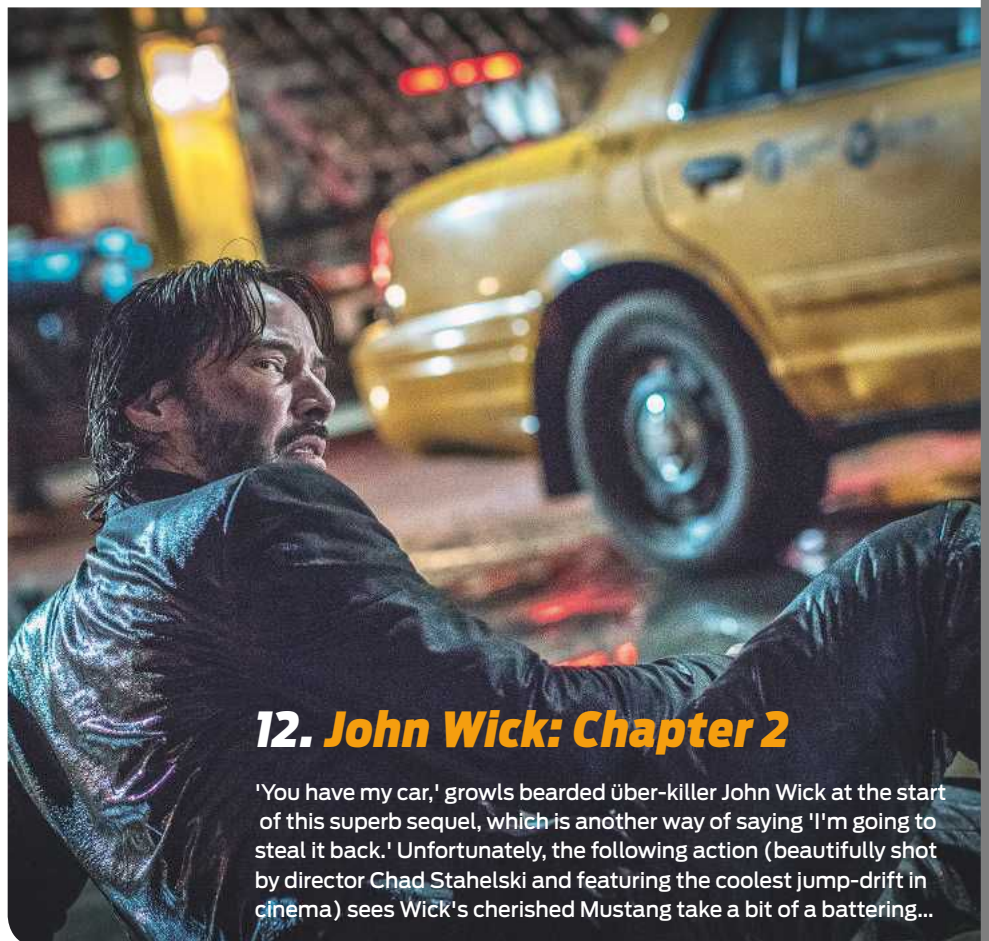
## 11. *Fast & Furious 5*

Crash, bang, wallop. This third-act smash-fest from the fifth (and probably best) *F&F* movie creates a path of destruction across Rio de Janeiro as a bank vault is pulled through the streets by a pair of Dodge V8s – and eventually used as a giant mace to swat vehicles out of the way. Totally ludicrous, but the snarling soundmix and driving talent on display make it hard not to watch again and again. >



## 14. *The Rock*

You can't set an action flick in San Francisco without tearing up and down its famously hilly streets, and this chase delivers the goods, with Sean Connery's HumVee pursued by Nic Cage's Ferrari and a line of panda cars. Obstacles are laid on and duly destroyed – a hippy's VW Beetle, an electricity pylon, a delivery truck, one of the city's iconic trams – while Connery dishes out the one-liners... 'I hope you're insured!'



## 12. *John Wick: Chapter 2*

'You have my car,' growls bearded über-killer John Wick at the start of this superb sequel, which is another way of saying 'I'm going to steal it back.' Unfortunately, the following action (beautifully shot by director Chad Stahelski and featuring the coolest jump-drift in cinema) sees Wick's cherished Mustang take a bit of a battering...





## 10. Death Proof

While Quentin Tarantino isn't the first name that springs to mind when you think of action, this grindhouse homage features a nail-biting chase sequence – a high-speed race to the death between a car-load of women and automotive psycho 'Stuntman Mike'. It ups the stakes by having stuntwoman Zoë Bell (playing herself) stuck on the bonnet, hanging on for dear life. One of cinema's 'how did they do that?' moments.



## 08. Mad Max: Fury Road

Outside of its opening and closing scenes, this enthralling reboot can be seen as one very long car-chase, but an on-the-road battle in the final act is its highlight. This rolls automobile carnage, vicious bonnet-top fights, pole-vaulting War Boys and emotional character beats into one audacious (and Dolby Atmos-fuelled) ten-minute sequence.

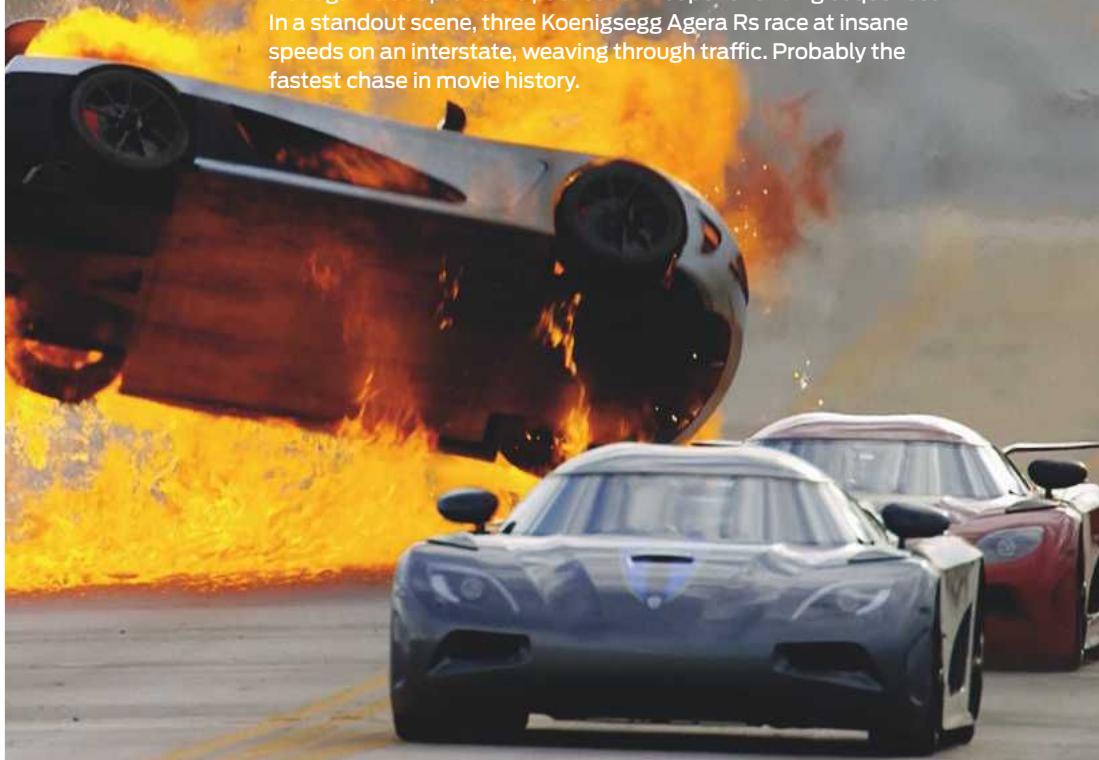


## 06. The Dark Knight

There are few cars better than the Batmobile (in any of its incarnations), and it features in this fan-favourite sequence from Christopher Nolan's comic book sequel. Shot with IMAX cameras and using *bona fide* stunts throughout, the chase may see the Batmobile done in by one of Joker's rockets, but this just ushers in the arrival of the Batpod, which then leads to the unforgettable sight of a juggernaut flipping head-over-heels. AV demo heaven.

## 09. Need for Speed

The presence of former stuntman Scott Waugh behind the camera and a reliance on practical stunts over CG effects ensures that this videogame adaptation is packed with superior driving sequences. In a standout scene, three Koenigsegg Agera Rs race at insane speeds on an interstate, weaving through traffic. Probably the fastest chase in movie history.



## 07. The Bourne Supremacy

Where *The Bourne Identity* found Matt Damon's amnesiac spy racing around Paris in a Mini Cooper, this first sequel has him stealing a taxi to flit through Moscow. What the resulting sequence lacks in pure speed, it makes up for with the brutal intensity and sense of reality created by the shaky-cam aesthetic favoured by director Paul Greengrass, and his decision to put you in the car right alongside Bourne. This is one cab ride that definitely deserves a big tip.







## 05. *Matrix Reloaded*

'You always told me to stay off the freeway,' Trinity tells Morpheus as they hit the asphalt with The Keymaker in their car and Agents and those dreadlocked Twins in pursuit. The following action is typical of the Wachowskis' sci-fi franchise – extended slow-mo shots, thumping techno score and implausible acrobatics. One CG moment looks a tad dated, but when the script calls for teleporting cyber-beings, what else can you do?



## 03. *Bad Boys II*

In any other movie this outsized sequence – a gargantuan car-chase with a shootout thrown in midway – would be its climax. Here it's just Act One fodder. Muscle cars, 4x4s, a Ferrari, a car-transporter truck and, erm, a speedboat all take to the stage, finishing with total carnage on Miami's MacArthur Causeway, an idea that required the bridge to be closed for three days during filming. Nothing quite like it has been attempted since.



## 02. *Jack Reacher*

Christopher McQuarrie's 2012 thriller has an old-school feel about it, and what's more old-school than a seven-minute car chase? Eschewing flashy antics (or intrusive score) for steely realism – Reacher even stalls at one point – this harks back to the likes of *The Seven-Ups* in its beautiful construction and moments of quiet between the mayhem. And the star isn't Tom Cruise, it's the engine sound of his V8 Chevrolet...

## 04. *Tokyo Drift*

If you've never given the unfairly ignored third *Fast and the Furious* film a spin and wonder why you should, look no further than this drift-tastic sequence which finds our heroes trying to outrun a couple of gangsters through Tokyo. Directed by series newcomer Justin Lin, this technically challenging chase is shot through with flair and pace – and even finds time for a (CG-assisted) drift through a crowd of pedestrians at the iconic Shibuya Crossing.



## 01. *Ronin*

Could there be any other pick for the top spot? This Euro thriller features two remarkable scenes, an initial rip around Nice before the Paris-set showstopper. In the latter, veteran director John Frankenheimer cuts from in-car cameras to convey speed to wider shots that show off the wheelwork, as the chase turns into a race through oncoming traffic and multi-car pile-ups. Epic.



# THE AGE OF WISDOM?



US install speaker specialist Wisdom Audio is making a play for UK custom home cinemas. **Martin Dew** gets the inside scoop on its Insight Series in-wall models, and then cops a listen...

**IF YOU FIND** yourself in the enviable position of having to scout around for a speaker package to deliver sonic goods in a premium, largescale home cinema, your auditioning journey may well take you to Wisdom Audio, and the company's latest planar magnetic, line-source 'Insight' series of in-wall models. You'd need to have a big budget, of course, but then that's the type of customer that this US-based company – recently alighted on Blighty's shores through custom installer distributor Habitech – is catering to.

Wisdom Audio began life in Nevada in 1996, when Tom and Debi Bohlender set about developing speaker products based on planar magnetic technology. According to managing director Luc Guillaume, the pair were 'focusing on the high-end

super-duper two channel' market. The company eventually changed hands, expanded its team, and shifted focus towards home cinema and in-wall applications. The biggest portion of business remains in the United States, but Wisdom is keen to grow. 'Within Europe,' says Guillaume, 'we've been getting more traction in Scandinavia so far than the more central European [countries]. But that's going to change very quickly.'

The brand has solutions for smaller rooms and tighter wallets, but Guillaume, formerly of JBL Synthesis, is rightly enthusiastic about the Insight custom installation line. I met him in the screening room of Habitech in Basingstoke, for a walk through of the performance characteristics and design philosophy of a 7.4.4 system, built around the Insight's flagship L8i LCRs.

These speakers (£7,695 each) are not re-configurable as a horizontal centre channel, and so are not designed to mount underneath or above a screen (more on that later), nor are they aimed at owners of Victorian terraces or shoebox new-builds. Rather, these 4.3ft-high towers are





The screening room of Wisdom Audio's UK distributor Habitech

Wisdom Audio MD Luc Guillaume says the company aims to grow its presence in European cinema rooms



designed to be installed in a dedicated cinema, ideally buried into a stud wall, and behind an acoustically transparent projection screen, although the series is slated to appear in the future as an on-wall option, too.

There are advantages to an in-wall speaker solution. There's the obvious aesthetic choice, avoiding that black-boxes-scattered-across-carpet vibe, and you can replicate your local multiplex by having your front wall taken up with just a screen, and nothing else. There are sonic reasons, too, one being that in-wall speakers benefit from the wall itself acting as a baffle, eliminating rear reflections.

The P4i in-wall surrounds (£2,750 each), of which there are six in this setup (four sides and two rears), include a grille which can be painted over. A further four in-ceiling sub-brand Sage ICS7a speakers (£3,320 each) take care of the height layer, and four (in-wall, in-ceiling or freestanding) S110 passive subs (£9,300 each) handle LFE. This adds up to a system costing in excess of £90,000 (not including controller/amps). This may all sound like overkill, but the Habitech screening room is a formidable size...

### In the line of fire

The Insight L8i LCR, as mentioned, is a 'line-source' design, using planar magnetic drivers (PMDs) with high-tensioned 'thin film' technology (aluminium conductors bonded to polyimide film) running vertically down the left front baffle. Although this film is also used in Wisdom's point source speakers – like the P4i is employed here – it's the specific properties of the L8i line-source design that the company claims runs circles around a point-source model for LCR speakers. And if that pun can be excused, it is literally because a point-source speaker radiates its energy spherically into the room, while a line-source speaker radiates its energy like a cylinder, with none transferred above or below.

The claimed net result of this design concept is that the audience hears more of what the front soundstage is putting out into the room, by drastically reducing floor and ceiling reflections. This allows greater intelligibility and, in the case of the Habitech room's dimensions, actually reduces boundary reflections by 42 per cent, I'm told, over a measured comparable point-source speaker. In other words, you hear more of the speaker and less of the room, or more direct rather than reflected sound.

'You're not sending energy to the ceiling, or to the floor,' explains Guillaume. 'Therefore, you're gaining a lot of clarity.'

This fact explains why the L8i must not only be mounted vertically, rather than horizontally, but situated optimally on-axis with the row(s) of seats in the room to allow for maximum coverage.

A second selling point to the line-source philosophy is what Wisdom Audio describes as 'power over distance', which translates into a more shared experience for your audience. The L8i speakers have a high sensitivity (rated at 91dB) and exhibit less 'propagation loss' than a point-source rival, it's claimed. Or, as Guillaume suggests: 'You get a lot more energy. From the last row to the front row, you'll hear very little difference.' Wisdom Audio says

the speaker loses only 3dB per doubling of distance from the baffle, rather than the typical 6dB.

Both the Insight L8i LCR and P4i, with their respective eight and four bass drivers, utilise passive crossovers. Far more technically unusual is the broad frequency range of the planar magnetic drivers, which drop down to 550Hz on the L8i, a good chunk lower than a standard dome tweeter and resulting in a low-to-high coverage of some six octaves. With this lower crossover, 'you have no transition between different elements where your ears are most sensitive,' boasts Guillaume.

Wisdom Audio's subwoofers are unusual too. At nearly 5.5ft in length, the floor, ceiling or wall-mountable S110 bass boxes incorporate another technology buzz-phrase: 'regenerative transmission line'. Each sub's interior is partitioned into literally a five-metre maze of passageways, allowing both front and back waves from the woofers to be output in phase, and therefore doubling down on the yield of direct energy. This physical architecture results in greater audible articulation, says Wisdom, and less distortion when compared to conventional subs.

The L8i speaker stands 1.3m high





The Insight range, be it the L8is (above) or P-prefixed point source models, are designed for in-wall applications

The S110's placement flexibility is summed up by Guillaume: 'You're able to put the cabinet of the transmission line, say, up in an attic, and extend the port – the mouth of the subwoofer – into a tube and then transfer the energy just through the ceiling by cutting an opening.' Such an aperture could, for example, be camouflaged as an air-conditioning grille, or whatever other feature you may have in your cinema den. Or you could install them freestanding.

### Fun on the freeway

I began listening with a series of appetite-whetting teasers from the DTS:X Blu-ray demo disc, before moving onto the highway fight/chase sequence from *Deadpool* on Blu-ray where traffic hell breaks loose on the tarmac. The Wisdom array immediately showed what it's all about – not only were in-car punches and headbutts rendered as explicit and visceral thuds, but bass response was lightning-fast, complemented by an enveloping sensation, as if a rippling orb of energy was convening at the sweet spot. Even competing with an all-out aural assault of crashing motorbikes, dragged bodies and flipping SUVs, dialogue was razor-sharp and beautifully intelligible, coming right forward in the mix. It is that very function of focused vertical dispersion speakers (as THX had always preached), that lends to that exquisitely accurate front soundstage placement.

Even though the soundtrack of *Apocalypse Now* maxes out at 5.1 channels, Walter Murch's expert mix for Coppola's Vietnam epic is always a reliable litmus test. During the second village attack, accompanied by Wagner's *Ride of the Valkyries*, the clatter of machine-gun fire from the Wisdoms was piercing, and each high-pitched ping of a launched gun cartridge nicking the floor was clearly decipherable. Helicopters were pivoting behind and above on their various trajectories, while the orchestra and voices separated themselves from the carnage, almost floating above the mix in a way that I've simply not witnessed before. It was one of those spine-tingling moments that premium AV delivers.

For something less aggressive, I spun up Roger Waters' *The Wall* on Blu-ray, one of the finest-sounding music recordings around. Waters' own just perceptible footsteps, then short trumpet solo at his father's war memorial, give way to an astounding dynamic transition as a B-52 Stratofortress disrupts the quiet from overhead, and the first notes of *In the Flesh?* blast the room with noise. The Insight system exhibited absolute control, and disseminated the sustained bass notes during the opening chords effortlessly. The crowd's roars demonstrated depth, where other systems might only have detected shrillness, and the drummer's on-stage snare immediately sounded resonant and easy to isolate.

An invisible system, then, that sounded largescale and astonishingly articulate. It was clear during my demo, however, that low-frequency output wasn't firing on all cylinders at certain moments and, if I was to be really picky, there appeared to be a very slight lack of coherence in the mid-range between the front and rear soundstages. But having established from the Habitech team that the very recent arrival of the equipment meant full calibration was not quite complete, both symptoms could easily be accounted for.

Wisdom can provide system controllers (the SC- series), which Guillaume believes are 'compulsory' to include in the package because of their advanced in-built active crossovers, and Audyssey (SC-1), or soon-to-be Dirac (SC-2 and SC-3), room equalization. The digital SA-3 three-channel stackable power amplifiers were also auditioned here for the LCRs, with an Arcam AV860 handling processing. You can, of course, system match with suitably potent and high-end gear.

Architecturally-friendly speakers are manna from heaven for system builders, and Wisdom's slender creations are seriously impressive – but perhaps you should expect nothing less from the not unhefty price tag. They slot into a marketplace with well-known rivals, of course, from Steinway Lyngdorf to JBL Synthesis, and they're certainly the sort of speakers you'll want to hear before you buy... ■

Planar magnetic drivers have a lower extension, increased detail and improved directivity, boasts Wisdom Audio





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# REVIEWS

→ **HARDWARE** HUMAX Triple-tuner Freeview Play PVR **TOSHIBA** 49in UHD TV  
**CAMBRIDGE AUDIO** Dolby Vision-capable 4K BD deck **PIEGA** Floorstanding 5.0 speaker array  
**PANASONIC** 65in 4K LED flatscreen **SIM2** Single-chip DLP UHD projector **Q ACOUSTICS**  
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**Diamonds are forever?**

Wharfedale revisits its affordable jewels for an eleventh generation – we put an £800 5.1 package to the test. See p44

HCC RATINGS KEY...	
Outstanding	★★★★★
Above average	★★★★☆
Acceptable	★★★☆☆
Disappointing	★★☆☆☆
Dire	★☆☆☆☆

All prices quoted are approximate and may have changed



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# Freeview Play with go-faster stripes

In hardware terms the lozenge-shaped FVP-5000T is practically identical to what went before. But Humax's earlier Freeview Play PVR – the 2015 FVP-4000T – was perhaps launched too early and, consequently, was far from stable...

Usability problems (our FVP-4000T review said it was 'recommended, but with caveats') were eventually nixed with software updates, but the experiences did nothing for the hard-won reputation of the set-top box specialist. The Korean firm may have learnt from its mistakes; I'm told that the FVP-5000T, which will replace the FVP-4000T, has been extensively tested before release.





## Martin Pipe discovers the under-the-hood updates that make Humax's FVP-5000T a Freeview flag-bearer

In exterior terms, the only obvious change from the FVP-4000T is a black carbon-fibre finish. AV connectivity is identical – aerial sockets, HDMI output, basic standard-def analogue connections, optical digital audio, Ethernet (Wi-Fi's built-in too) and a pair of USB ports, one of which is located on the side of that distinctive enclosure. Internally, too, little has changed. You still get three tuners, but Humax has found new ways of wringing the last drop of potential from them.

There's no support for 4K, whether native or upscaled. And as before, the FVP-5000T is available in hard drive capacities of 500GB, 1TB and 2TB (priced at £230, £260 and £300 respectively). Tested here is the 500GB version.

### Revamped remote

The only obvious external difference is a redesigned handset, with larger buttons for frequently accessed functions (notably on-demand content) and the replacement of the FVP-4000T's 'home' button with

a Freeview Play one. Given the hardware similarities of the boxes, it shouldn't shock you to learn that the old handset operates the new PVR.

The FVP-5000T's zapper is nevertheless suggestive of a radical software re-think, which is exactly what Humax has done. It starts with the revised setup function, which is wizard-driven and speedy. You'll be up and watching within minutes.

The overall user interface represents a significant advance. Pressing the Freeview Play button gives you a dashboard arranged in rows, with the currently selected TV channel playing in the background. The first row contains links to the retro-active (catch-up-enabled) EPG, catch-up players, Top Picks (Humax recommendations), your recordings, the onboard DLNA media player and system settings. Beneath this are a sequence of Freeview-recommended programmes in thumbnail form, and a bottom row with icons depicting popular catch-up players (iPlayer, All4, etc.) and apps. Clicking on a thumbnail or icon accesses the associated service. You can also call up an On Now function that displays the current offerings of a customisable channel selection.

On top of this are the dedicated handset buttons, which short-cut to some of the above – among them Netflix, the EPG and recording lists. 'On Demand' displays a Freeview Play-curated grid of popular programmes on catch-up. But you might choose the menu accessible Top Picks instead. Following a software update, planned for early next year, this will learn your viewing habits and apply a personalised slant to its suggestions.

One area when the FVP-5000T falls short of some of the competition is its lack of voice search. Here, you have to hunt for specific content the traditional way – hit the magnifying glass 'search' button on the handset, and start entering the name of a programme to find it. It'll likely throw up an extensive list, as all occurrences of your search are listed – categorised by 'on-demand', 'broadcast' and 'other' viewings. The latter links to the top-fifty associated YouTube clips, perhaps making the FVP-5000T unique among set-top boxes. I wonder what broadcasters will make of it...

This PVR also dovetails neatly with the previously reviewed Humax Eye security camera, enabling you to view live pictures and recorded footage on your TV. Indeed, the necessary app is pre-installed (others available include fitness, internet radio, kids' stories and classical music).

Like its predecessor, the FVP-5000T is also compatible with the £80 Humax H3 Smart TV box, which will stream live TV channels from one of the PVR's tuners. This gadget is handy when deployed in a room with network coverage (the H3 is Wi-Fi-capable) but no aerial outlet, giving you an inexpensive multiroom fix. And if you've configured the FVP-5000T to act as a media server, then you can stream recordings (and other stored media) to the H3. Cool.

All of the features one expects of a PVR are present and correct. Naturally you can manipulate buffered live TV with transport buttons on the handset (which will also operate basic TV functions). Also available are subtitles, favourite channels, Freeview radio, support for audio-described soundtracks, digital teletext and easy scheduling of recordings via the EPG.

The latter doesn't just support series-linking. If you schedule a recording, and a related programme is

### AV INFO

**PRODUCT:**  
Triple-tuner,  
networked  
Freeview Play PVR

**POSITION:**  
Replacement for  
the FVP-4000T

**PEERS:**  
Panasonic  
DMR-HWT150EB;  
Sky Q;  
BT TV

1. The slender FVP-5000T will slot easily into any AV furniture

2. Humax's new handset offers a Freeview Play hot key



detected, you're asked if that should be recorded too. And the number of programmes that can be simultaneously recording has been extended from the FVP-4000T's three to at least five, thanks to how the new model deals with broadcast multiplexes (each tuner handles an entire multiplex, which can carry several channels).

You don't even have to be in the same room – or, for that matter, the same country – as the FVP-5000T to select programmes for recording. Install Humax's Live TV app on your smart device (iOS/Android), and the job can be done

**'This helps you navigate your way through a bewildering degree of viewing choice, and make the most of it'**

from any location that yields some sort of connection – provided you remembered to enable remote recording in the FVP-5000T's menus before heading out. Live TV has another useful purpose. If you're at home, and your smart device is connected to your home network, live broadcasts or recordings can be streamed to it.

Menus allow you to customise the box to your needs – recording padding time, network considerations, HDMI mode, lip-sync, parental controls and so on.

Criticisms of the FVP-4000T (being unresponsive, freezing occasionally and an unappealing user interface) have been addressed by this new model (and note that the FVP-4000T should itself get something of a polish in a January software update). Menus can still be a little sluggish on occasions, but response times are on the whole acceptable. The FVP-5000T is also far more reliable, not crashing or missing recordings once in over a month.

Buggy it may have been, but one couldn't fault the FVP-4000T's AV quality. Needless to say its successor also impresses in this regard, especially with HD channels, of which there are now 15. Pictures are crisp and detailed, with faithful colour rendering and a wide dynamic range. Noise and artefacts are kept at bay, and on no occasion did glitches or lip-sync issues spoil the fun. The box gets the best of these channels, whether you're watching live news programmes from a brightly-lit studio, or the murkier scenes of C4's *Electric Dreams* drama series. SD channels, which are upscaled, naturally don't fare as well. There's less detail, and artefacts are

## SPECIFICATIONS

**HDD:** Yes. 500GB **TUNER:** Yes. 3 x Freeview HD **CATCH-UP SERVICES:** Yes. BBC iPlayer, ITV Player, All4, Demand 5, UKTV Play **CONNECTIONS:** Aerial in/out; composite video/stereo audio; optical digital audio output; HDMI v1.4; Ethernet; 2 x USB (1 x side-mounted) **DIMENSIONS:** 280(w) x 48(h) x 200(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 1kg

**FEATURES:** Wi-Fi; Freeview Play; timeshifting; app with timer-scheduling and local streaming available; DLNA server and media player; record 5+ channels simultaneously; SMB/FTP access; compatibility with H3 and Humax Eye; media playback from USB; Top Picks; Smart Search; universal remote; apps incl. Netflix and YouTube

## PARTNER WITH



**HUMAX H3:** Link this Wi-Fi/Ethernet streaming box to the FVP-5000T and you can view the latter's recordings/live TV in a second room. Online functionality includes Netflix, YouTube and TV Player for broadcast content. Price is £80.

noticeable – even with mainstream channels. Personally, I wonder if SD broadcasting is living on borrowed time.

Streamed content, like YouTube and on-demand (HD is supported), is a mixed-bag, but that's down to the source.

Audio doesn't disappoint either. 5.1 soundtracks retain their clarity and dynamics, even after the box has transcoded them to Dolby Digital (I'd still like 5.1 PCM, though). As you're merely capturing transport streams, recordings look and sound as good as the original airings.

In all, Humax's FVP-5000T is a superb product that brings together broadcast, timeshifting, on-demand, networked, USB and online content. It not only helps you navigate your way through a bewildering degree of viewing choice, but it helps you make the most of it – thanks to a well-designed user interface and faultless performance. An obvious choice if you're a telly addict in the market for a Freeview PVR ■

## HCC VERDICT



### Humax FVP-5000T

→ £230 (500GB) → [uk.humaxdigital.com](http://uk.humaxdigital.com)

**WE SAY:** A welcome upgrade over the previous FVP-4000T, this triple-tuner PVR gives Freeview aficionados plenty of flexibility and functionality.

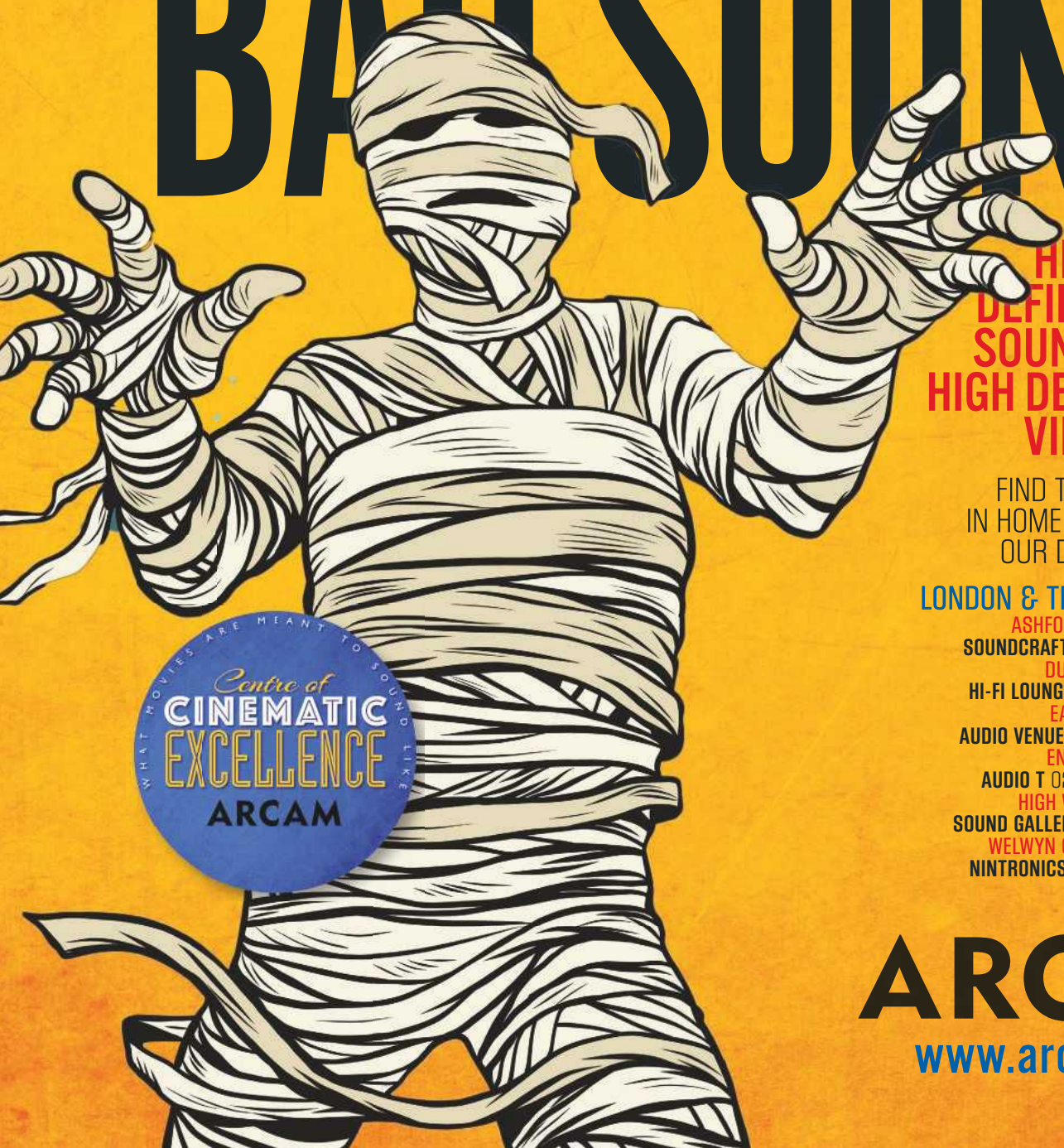
3



**3.** There's even a composite video output for people with ancient TVs...



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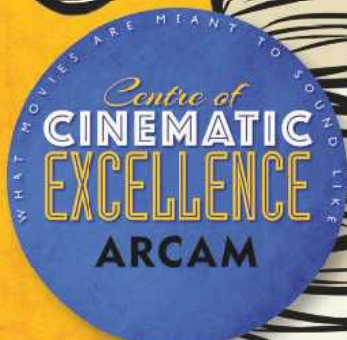
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44 WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 11 HCP/£800



1

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**Mark Craven** tries to ignore those Spinal Tap puns while savouring Wharfedale's latest...

# Home cinema turned up to 11

Wharfedale's Diamond speaker range is nearly as old as I am. First launched in 1981, new for 2017 is an eleventh generation, ranging through three bookshelf speakers, three floorstanders and a pair of centre channels. Auditioned here are the diddliest Diamonds, plus an also-new SW-10 subwoofer, in what the brand sells as its Diamond 11 HCP. Does this 5.1 system shine?

Well, one thing it has going for it is the £800 price, a figure that these days gets you merely half of a mid-spec 65in TV. Also in its favour is the styling. While not cutely curved like some sub/sat arrays, there's a timeless charm to these. They're square-edged but well proportioned, and with (on our sample) a refined, blackwood finish – white is an alternative.

The system breaks down thus: four Diamond 11.0 bookshelf speakers, one Diamond 11.CC centre, and the SW-10 subwoofer. Bought as Wharfedale's 5.1 package, you currently save about £30 on the collective price.

For this eleventh generation of its popular line, the manufacturer has revamped ...well, everything – drivers, crossover design and cabinet construction. 'The Diamond 11 represents the most significantly enhanced Diamond series in years,' claims Wharfedale.

New 1in soft dome tweeters are used across the 11.0s and 11.CC, featuring an 'oversized' magnet at their behind and vented into a fibre-filled rear chamber. The result, says the brand, is an extended lower-frequency response that allows the tweeter to better contribute to mid-range performance.

Joining the tweeter (and doubling up on the 11.CC) is a 4in woven Kevlar midbass driver, again a new design, and again boasting an oversized magnet to boost sensitivity (although neither the 11.0 or 11.CC are extraordinarily sensitive at 85dB and 87dB respectively), and improve cone control.

Not featured on these junior Diamonds are the curved cabinet designs and slot-loaded distribution ports of the pricier models. There use traditional vents.

Speaker terminals on the Diamond 11.0s are a little loose-feeling, but plenty of room around them makes fitting bare-ended cable easy. The terminals on the centre channel are of a different breed – altogether chunkier and more rugged. This speaker itself is quite sizable, with a

width of 416mm that may require some consideration about where it's installed.

## Space invader

When discussing the package, Wharfedale informed me that the SW-10 subwoofer is 'compact', a description that proves all things are relative. Yes, compared to, say, an SVS PB16-Ultra, it's a tiddler, but it dwarves genuine compact woofers like the Artison Nano, and stands tall courtesy of four sizable feet, enough to give its down-facing port room to breathe.

As per its name, the SW-10 uses a 10in (front-firing) woofer, crafted from a reinforced non-pressed paper and fabric composite that, it's claimed, improves speed and accuracy over traditional designs. Onboard power comes from a 200W Class D amplifier (the brand has used AB amps for some of its subwoofers in the past).

The back panel is about as simple as they come. There are flip switches for phase and the sub's auto sensor function, plus dials for crossover and gain. Inputs are limited to just stereo phono, the right-channel marked for single LFE feeds.

Usually I like to run a subwoofer without its grille, just to occasionally glance over and see its driver going into spasm during deep bass moments. With Wharfedale's SW-10 I'm not sure I'd keep the grille off – not only does it leave exposed the fixing spikes on the front baffle, but the 10in driver is framed by a large, rather bling-tastic trim ring that will catch reflections from any light sources.

It looks quite ominous, like having the Eye of Sauron in your cinema room.

*Kong: Skull Island* (Blu-ray) has a soundmix to cherish (in both Atmos and DTS-HD MA flavours), and doesn't make you wait long to give your speaker system something to chew over – under three minutes in fact.

## AV INFO

**PRODUCT:**  
Bookshelf 5.1  
speaker package

**POSITION:**  
Above Wharfedale's  
entry-level DX-1SE  
5.1 bundle

**PEERS:**  
Focal Sib Evo;  
KEF E Series;  
Q Acoustics 3000

**1. Don't fancy black?**  
There's also a white  
finish available



The Warner Bros and Legendary logos are accompanied by panning machine-gun fire and portentous brass score, before silence descends – only to be broken by the scream of a falling airman, followed by his jettisoned plane plummeting to earth. Seconds later, the US pilot is unhooking his parachute, before embarking on a (failed) shootout with a Japanese rival. It's a mere sliver of the movie, but tells you a lot about the Diamond 11 HCP's performance.

Firstly, this system sounds clear and articulate, with midrange and treble details easy on the ear. It's not particularly biting in its handling of impactful Foley effects (the clank of parachute clips, or a pistol being unholstered), but that's not necessarily a bad thing if you like to finish movie night without your ears bleeding. There's a smoothness here that's highly enjoyable, and never rolled-off to the extent that you feel you're missing out.

Secondly, the front soundstage as a whole is well-realised. Strafing guns and buzzing aircraft zip across the LCR, maintaining tonal consistency. There's good imaging, although, as perhaps expected, scale is not particularly overwhelming – there's only so far small(ish) cabinets can go to drown you in sound. This is also true of the soundfield created by the 5.1 set as a whole. While surround channel details blend well with the rest of the array, benefiting from identical speakers fore and aft, more widely-dispersed speakers would envelope you more.

## Rumble in the jungle

Back to *Kong*. Our fighter pilots have a bit of a chase through the jungle, followed by a brief hand-to-hand scrap.



Again, the expression of the Diamond 11s shines through. Whether it's the background croaks of insects, frantic breathing, a sword tearing flesh or a throaty yell, it sounds realistic and nicely detailed.

And then all hell breaks loose, and the SW-10, which until now has been tasked with underpinning weapons' fire and punches with well-measured tightness, has to get to work, as first one and then the other of Kong's almighty paws smacks down on the ground, the beast ready to pull himself up a cliff face and let out a mighty roar.

This sudden addition of copious LFE, and the surge in dynamics, immediately has me thinking the Diamond HCP's £800 asking price is money well spent. At these low registers, the woofer may be a little flabby (it isn't the last



word in nuance or control, but sells on its own for £350, so that's not surprising), but it fills the room with ease and an up-and-at-'em attitude, with swelling bass that doesn't cross the line into sounding coarse. So, no, it isn't compact – and it doesn't sound compact either.

A similar full-on sequence (the helicopter assault in Chapters 3/4) is just pure fun. At one point the sound designers slow the track down, so that bassy chopper blades slur eerily around the soundstage, an effect that

## 'Wharfedale's Diamond system is articulate, well-balanced and isn't afraid of seismic movie moments'

the Wharfedales relish, with subwoofer and speaker melding well together. And then, as the action gets frantic, crisp effects, rich bass notes and resonant dialogue are thrown together. The speed of the sequence doesn't faze this affordable package, either.

Brit comedy *Mindhorn* (Blu-ray) is a total change of pace, from outsized gorillas to slapstick comedy on the Isle of Man. It's not, therefore, a soundmix to show off the Diamond HCP's bombastic side, but still impresses when it comes to clarity. Dialogue is paramount here, and the larger Diamond 11.CC speaker has no trouble finding the difference between actor Julian Barratt's normal voice and his plummier tones when he switches into 'Mindhorn mode'. With lighter-weight fare such as this, the Diamond HCP just gets the job done, without fuss.

John Carpenter's *Halloween* (35th Anniversary Edition Blu-ray) presents a different challenge, with a sparse, lo-fi soundmix and iconic score. The latter is carried well by the Diamond speakers, with the rhythmic piano, in particular, well defined. Jamie Lee Curtis' shrieks upon finding her classmates have reached their grim demises are shrill, but not uncomfortably so. Well, apart from the fact the whole film makes you feel uncomfortable – the Diamond HCP may not cocoon you in sound, but the ear for detail ensures minor soundtrack elements layer on the tension.

## None more black...

As the Diamond 11.0s will have been primarily created with music fans in mind, I spun up a few audio-only favourites.

Metallica's *Spit out the Bone* (*Hardwired... to Self-Destruct*, CD) is a lightning-fast charge of distorted guitars, crashing symbols and thumping kick drum, and the Wharfedale system makes a good attempt at conveying its thrashy energy. The SW-10's delivery of the double-quick bass thuds can seem a little obvious, but the mid-range presence of the rest of the sextet lends a menacing, cutting-edge to Kirk Hammett and James Hetfield's guitar riffs. Switching my AVR into Pure Direct mode removes the sub from the equation, and while the soundstage loses scale, it shows the panache of the Diamond 11.0 bookshelves across the frequency range, with a performance that really can't be sniffed at for the standalone price of £160 per pair.

My penchant for heavy metal never seems to get the best out of speakers, however, so I switched genres to the more laid-back and intimate material of The Beach Boys. *Don't Worry Baby*, from 1964, isn't a sparkling example of

## SPECIFICATIONS

### Diamond 11.0

**DRIVE UNITS:** 1 x 4in woven Kevlar midbass driver; 1 x 1in textile dome tweeter  
**ENCLOSURE:** Rear-ported bass reflex **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 75Hz-20kHz  
**SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 85dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 15W-75W **DIMENSIONS:** 255(h) x 155(w) x 165(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 3.1kg

### Diamond 11.CC

**DRIVE UNITS:** 2 x 4in woven Kevlar midbass drivers; 1 x 1in textile dome tweeter  
**ENCLOSURE:** Down-ported bass reflex **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 85Hz-20kHz  
**SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 87dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 25W-100W  
**DIMENSIONS:** 145(h) x 420(w) x 138(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 5kg

### SW-10 (subwoofer)

**DRIVE UNITS:** 1 x 10in long-throw non-pressed cone woofer **ENCLOSURE:** Front-firing, down-ported **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 40Hz-120Hz (+/-3dB)  
**ONBOARD POWER:** 200W Class D amplifier **REMOTE CONTROL:** No **DIMENSIONS:** 416(h) x 336(w) x 381(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 15kg **CONNECTIONS:** LFE input; stereo phono input

## PARTNER WITH



**KONG: SKULL ISLAND:** With its 'Apocalypse Now with monkeys vibe', 1970s-fuelled soundtrack, glorious VFX, fast-paced plot, pristine image quality and brutal Dolby Atmos and DTS-HD MA soundmixes, this is a Blu-ray you can't afford not to own.

hi-fi recording, but gets under my skin here all the same. The Diamond HCP unpicks the five vocalists that make up its harmonies, Brian Wilson's falsetto down to Mike Love's bassy tones, and most importantly doesn't obscure the emotion in the song, which is both melancholy and uplifting – a neat trick.

And, finally, a track I can't get enough of at the moment is London Grammar's slow-burner *Hey Now*. Streamed via Spotify Connect, it finds the Wharfedale array offering pleasing clarity; muted guitar plucks, echoing synth drums and Hannah Graham's wondrous vocals sound distinct and free from the enclosures. It also gives better evidence of the low-end strengths of the Diamond 11.0 speakers, requiring them to dig deep to unearth the continuous bass line. I'm now thinking I should invest in a *Hey Now* hi-res download.

## The price is right

Overall, this is a delightful, affordable package from the Brit brand. Cabinet size (particularly the SW-10 subwoofer and Diamond 11.CC) may be an issue for those with the sort of small setups than an £800 budget no doubt caters to – something like Q Acoustics' 7000i or KEF's E305 bundle (both more expensive) are perhaps more appropriate for a discreet 5.1 installation – but the styling and build quality are fine. Even better is how this system performs for the price. It's articulate, well-balanced and isn't afraid of seismic movie moments ■

## HCC VERDICT



### Wharfedale Diamond 11 HCP

→ £800 → [www.wharfedale.co.uk](http://www.wharfedale.co.uk)

**WE SAY:** Sonically impressive bookshelves bolstered by a punchy subwoofer. Aesthetically neat and tidy, too – and with a price tag that will appeal to many.

**2. Unlike larger slot-loaded Diamond 11 speakers, the 11.0s have rear ports**

**3. Wharfedale is also releasing 12in and 15in SW series subs**





This 4K spinner sheds hookups to embrace a brave new world, discovers **Mark Craven**

# It's digital or nothing

Cambridge Audio hasn't rushed to release its debut 4K player – the likes of Panasonic and Samsung are already onto second-wave models – but the UK corp has a reputation for premium performance and build, not leading a format charge. Does its CXUHD hit the heights that brand fans will expect? And does it do anything different to the competition?

The answer to the latter question is certainly 'yes', but perhaps not in the way you'll have been thinking. While rival decks launched around this £700 price point, such as Panasonic's DMP-UB900 and Oppo's UDP-203, backed up their digital smarts with multichannel analogue audio outputs, there are no such connections on the CXUHD. Heck, there isn't even a stereo phono output.

Those with a passing knowledge of AV gear will realise this means something else – the CXUHD has no onboard DACs (Digital-to-Analogue Converters). It's therefore most accurately described as a 'transport', able to shunt digital audio (and video, obviously) onto an AVR for decoding. The company's most recent CD player, the CXC, was also a transport, but it's previous BD deck, the CXU, wasn't. So there's obviously been a change in thinking.

CA's reasoning is that, by removing audio processing, 'the entire power' of its onboard 64-bit quad-core chipset is used for image processing – 'giving you the very best 4K UHD viewing experience possible.'

On the one hand, the absence of multichannel analogue outputs makes some sense. With HDMI the conduit for 4K HDR video and Atmos/DTS:X bitstreams, most 4K BD buyers will lace to their AVR/processor this way. The lack of a two-channel analogue output, on a universal deck that plays CD, SACD and DVD-Audio platters, is more surprising.

## Chips ahoy!

Less of a surprise is the player's support for Dolby Vision HDR. At the CXUHD's heart is a MediaTek chipset; similar silicon is employed in the DV-capable Oppo UDP-203. Where the journey will go regarding next-gen HDR variants remains to be seen. Samsung, Amazon, Panasonic and Twentieth

Century Fox are causing a stir with HDR10+, but DV has been bolstered by support from Apple, plus actual physical disc content. It's no doubt a good feature to have if you own a compatible TV. The lack of such a screen meant DV went untested in this audition, though.

The player features Cambridge Audio's typical CX design. This means you get a brushed aluminium front plate, discreet buttonry, centralised disc tray and display, and a hefty weight (5kg) that instils confidence. The overall styling is classy, with the deck seeming to float a little off your AV furniture courtesy of recessed feet. It looks grownup and ready for business.

Front-facing connections are zero – there's no quick-stop USB input. Around the back, the absence of phono outputs does leave things a little sparse, but otherwise connectivity is fine. There are two HDMI outputs (one audio only), joined by an HDMI input for connecting an external source (Cambridge Audio suggests a media stick/player, thus adding video-on-demand tricks to a deck with otherwise no apps). Both coaxial and optical digital audio outs are offered, alongside two USB inputs, RS-232, 12V trigger in/out and Ethernet. Wi-Fi is integrated.

The user interface features menus that are crisp and responsive. They share the same basic architecture as Oppo's decks (that'll be that MediaTek SoC again) and user options too – this means, when it comes to video output, selectable bit-depth and colour sampling rates, metadata stripping from HDR content, and a custom resolution mode. But with that stripped-back audio connectivity and processing, there's none of the Oppo's pre-amp functionality.

The remote control is full-length but slim, with a nice tactile back panel. Button layout is a bit

## AV INFO

**PRODUCT:**  
Ultra HD Blu-ray player with Dolby Vision support

**POSITION:**  
CA's first 4K deck joins its CX range of separates

**PEERS:**  
Oppo UDP-203; Panasonic DMP-UB900

1. CA's full-width player sports a brushed aluminium face-plate

2. The slim remote can feel a bit fiddly



unintuitive though (this possibly has the smallest, oddest-placed 'Play' key I've ever found on a BD remote) and the legends are tiny. There is a backlight function, which is good news.

The player loads discs quickly (with identical speeds to an Oppo UDP-203, actually) and, during my audition, didn't falter or freeze once with any title – BD, CD, SACD or 4K BD.

## Heaven is a place on Earth

Image quality is bang on the nose. 4K discs exhibit authentic sharpness, wide contrast and rich colouration. *Planet Earth II* is disgorged as a tapestry of subtle and searing hues, with astonishing detail and silky motion. The CXUHD itself keeps its head down, a quiet operational whirr in no danger of spoiling your enjoyment.

A subjective head-to-head with an Oppo UDP-203, with both players in Auto output modes, yielded no difference in image presentation on a 65in 4K display when it came to detail or sense of image depth. That's not to say that performance is identical; just that I didn't discern it. I did discover, however, that pressing the rewind key on the Cambridge remote also caused the Oppo's disc tray to open and shut. Odd.

As my colleague John Archer discovers (see p68) onboard BD deck tweaks can have their use. Brightness, contrast, saturation, hue, sharpness and noise reduction sliders can all be called up from the settings button on the handset, and can have an aggressive impact on image quality. Sensibly, sharpness and noise reduction default to '0' – off, in other words. You can save adjustments to user slots. Note that any changes you make are disabled if the player is switched to Source Direct resolution mode.

With so much of your system hardware offering 4K upscaling, ascertaining where to introduce it can be a tiresome task. Yet it became apparent (admittedly not from a typical viewing distance) that the CXUHD gave marginally cleaner results over the internal scaling on a Pioneer AVR. Upscaled BDs are blemish-free.

Gone from the previous CXU deck is audio upsampling of all inputs to 192kHz/24-bit, but that doesn't mean this universal player lacks any musical charm. Hi-res (and lossless) tracks, output over HDMI, exhibit precision and clarity. Barb Jungr's Dylan cover *Sara* (SACD, Linn Records) carries her vocal inflections and undulating piano accompaniment, to the point where it's almost hypnotic. Led Zeppelin's *Custard Pie* (Physical Graffiti, CD),

## SPECIFICATIONS

**3D:** Yes **ULTRA HD:** Yes **HDR:** Yes. HDR10 and Dolby Vision **UPSCALING:** Yes. To 2160p **MULTIREGION:** No. Region B BD/R2 DVD (Ultra HD discs are region-free) **HDMI:** Yes. 2 x HDMI outputs (1 x audio only); 1 x HDMI v2.0 input **MULTICHANNEL ANALOGUE:** No. **DIGITAL AUDIO:** Yes. Coaxial and optical input **ETHERNET:** Yes **BUILT IN WI-FI:** Yes **SACD/DVD-A:** Yes/Yes **DIMENSIONS:** 82(h) x 430(w) x 312(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 5kg

**FEATURES:** USB x 2; HDR-to-SDR converter; variable bit-depth and colour sub-sampling; DLNA media playback; hi-res audio and video file playback from networked devices/USB; user image slots; strip-metadata function (retains BT.2020 colour space); backlit remote

## PARTNER WITH



**SONY 65ZD9:** A 2016 4K HDR TV but one due a firmware update for Dolby Vision support before the year is out. This premium 65-incher sells for around £3,300. If it's not big enough for you, consider 75in (£7,000) and 100in (£60,000!) models.

meanwhile, casts Jimmy Page's opening riff stage right, before bass and snare take centre stage. As the track progresses, instruments are well separated; when Page's guitar solo kicks in, the slight reverb is easy to detect.

## Potential purchase

The CXUHD is a somewhat curious addition to the 4K landscape – a premium deck from a hi-fi favourite brand that cuts the analogue cords altogether. I have no qualms about its picture and sound performance, or its usability (beyond the aforementioned handset niggles) and beautiful construction, but I do wonder if potential buyers will view its spec sheet as a little lacking in light of the competition – not just those missing multichannel outputs, but the stereo audio hookup, too. If you're a movie fan looking to mix things up a bit with your next player purchase, it might not fit the bill. A qualified recommendation ■

## HCC VERDICT



### Cambridge Audio CXUHD

→ £700 → [www.cambridgeaudio.com](http://www.cambridgeaudio.com)

**WE SAY:** Beyond Cambridge Audio's deliberate omissions, this is a well-featured 4K spinner (Dolby Vision, HDMI input, user tweaks) that looks and sounds great. Not cheap, though.

3



**3.** CA suggests using the player's HDMI input for an HDMI media stick



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# **ARCAM**

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Do your speakers sound a little constrained? Piega might have just the thing for you, says **Ed Selley**

# Swiss speaker space-craft

Speaker brands comfortably outnumber electronic ones in the multichannel world. At any given price point, you'll have more speaker options than you will amplifier choices. As a result, the market is crowded and new arrivals can't simply rely on looking smart. Handy for Piega, then, that behind the reasonably attractive cabinets of this 5.0 system, there's a lot going on.

Most notable is the tweeter that's common to all units. It might look a like a ribbon tweeter, but is something rather different. Piega is one of only a few brands – and one of the most consumer-friendly when it comes to pricing – to dress its speakers with an Air Motion Transformer (AMT). This is a folded diaphragm that effectively works like a shrunk high-frequency accordion. A back and forth motion creates treble energy but, because the unit itself is very large – effectively equivalent to a driver several inches across – the radiating effect is correspondingly greater. It's a treble unit that – on paper at least – looks perfect for the job of creating a wide, immersive soundstage, and claims a high-frequency extension all the way to 40kHz.

As well as the AMT, the three models that make up this set – the £1,600p/p Classic 5.0 floorstanders, £900p/p Classic 3.0 standmounts and £650 Center Classic Large – feature one or more midbass drivers that use a system that Piega terms 'MDS' (Maximum Displacement Suspension), which is designed to help them deliver a long throw without distortion or cone breakup. Unusually, the centre and fronts make use of a 5in driver while the standmounts feature a larger 6.5in unit. This deviates from the absolute ideal of having the same driver in every corner of the room, but as the materials and technologies are the same, I'm not too concerned.

The Classic enclosures are traditional in design, certainly by the standards of Piega. They're made from MDF sections and are flat-sided. Further up the Classic range, the cabinets switch to curved edges, which is something of a Piega trademark, and if you really open your wallet up, the Swiss company does a mean line in aluminium enclosures. This might mean that the Classics don't sound terribly exciting design-wise, but the cabinets themselves are well finished and extremely solid to the touch. The black finish is standard (white is also available) but for

a price premium you can also get them in Macassar Ebony, which looks rather tasty.

Like a number of packages from smaller audio companies, this array didn't come with a subwoofer. You can look at offerings from the usual suspects to partner them. In terms of matching with electronics, the Piegas should be pretty straightforward. Providing that your receiver can handle a four-ohm load – and most AVRs from £1,000 ought to – the Classics have the advantage of being impressively sensitive. I was able to test them with the Emotiva A-700 power amplifier [see HCC #278] which was still present in my system, and this had no trouble at all with them. Installation is easy enough, too. There are optional plinths for the floorstanders (not photographed) that are simple to attach and the terminals are a cinch to connect cables to.

## Just a little nudge...

Once up and running, it is the sensitivity of the Piegas that is most immediately apparent. The speakers need a lower posted volume level to hit key test tone increments than almost any comparably sized speaker package I've tested, and this is matched by a very even performance from low through to neighbour-aggravating levels. Listen a bit longer, though, and the speakers reveal other distinctive and positive qualities.

Even though there are two different midbass drivers at work in the array, subjectively everything sounds seamless. The fight between Peter Quill and Ego at the end of *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol 2* (Blu-ray) is truly involving, with a smooth and controlled transition from speaker to speaker and plenty of impact available from each cabinet, reducing the demands made on your subwoofer.

There's plenty of fine detail, too. The realism quotient in a scene where a man fights a planet is hard to quantify, but everything sounds convincing, with depth to the cracking, >

## AV INFO

**PRODUCT:**  
5.0-channel  
floorstanding  
speaker set

**POSITION:**  
Toward the low-end  
of Piega's lineup

**PEERS:**  
Spendor S3/5R2  
CR3 system;  
DALI Opticon 5.1

**1. AMT tweeters  
are used across the  
Piega Classic range**

crumbling Foley work. And there's a solid sense of energy. The Classic speakers might be civilised compared to something like Neat's irrepressible IOTA five-channel pack [see *HCC* #272] but they are still effortlessly capable of loading a room.

The party piece of this Piega Classic 5.0 system really only makes itself felt when you switch to something less in-er-face. The AMT tweeters are absolutely outstanding

**'There is a lack of boxiness here that at times means you completely dial the Piega speakers out of the equation'**

with dialogue, and give the soundfield a realism and tangibility that is rarely heard at the price. The first meeting between Deckard and Tyrell in *Blade Runner* (Blu-ray) is stunningly real; the fractional echo to their voices and every change to their intonation is captured perfectly.

More than anything else, you get a complete sense of the scope and scale of any space that the Classics are asked to reproduce. Their extremely wide dispersion is a factor in this; you'll feel surrounded by cavernous environments onscreen.

## Proof in the pudding

As mentioned earlier, the performance here is linear. The Piegas' headline tricks – clarity, detail and soundstage depth/width – are just as useful with *The Great British Bake Off* as they are for movie night, and they remain in evidence when volume levels are kept low. The Classic Center Large is the unsung hero here. It has no trouble unpicking the congested and recessed centre channel that can accompany a number of TV multichannel broadcasts, ensuring that you don't miss a single word of dramatic dialogue or groan-worthy pastry pun. If you use your speakers all the time, these are a good fit.

Unsurprisingly, considering the brand's audiophile ethos, this package cuts the mustard when asked to

## SPECIFICATIONS

### Classic 5.0

**DRIVE UNITS:** 1 x AMT tweeter; 2 x 5in 'MDS' midbass drivers **ENCLOSURE:** Ported **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 36Hz-40kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 91dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 150W **DIMENSIONS:** 180(w) x 930(h) x 280(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 20kg

### Classic 3.0

**DRIVE UNITS:** 1 x AMT tweeter; 1 x 6.5in 'MDS' midbass drivers **ENCLOSURE:** Ported **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 38Hz-40kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 89dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 150W **DIMENSIONS:** 210(w) x 340(h) x 280(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 7.7kg

### Classic Center Large

**DRIVE UNITS:** 1 x AMT tweeter; 2 x 5in 'MDS' midbass drivers **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 50Hz-40kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 90dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 150W **DIMENSIONS:** 480(w) x 180(h) x 260(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 11kg

## PARTNER WITH



**YAMAHA RX-A3070:** Rated for four-ohm as well as eight-ohm loads, Yamaha's flagship nine-channel AVR (£2,200) follows the brand's Aventure construction ethos, and should have the power on tap to drive the Piega speakers with ease.

go hi-fi. Yes, in the same way that the Classics can sometimes sound restrained with ballistic action sequences, they can also lack the last ounce of excitement and dynamism with music, but the trade-off is an exceptional refinement in their mids and highs and a soundstage that can draw you into a track. A blast of the new Stars album (*There is No Love in Fluorescent Light*), from Tidal via a Yamaha WX-AD10, generates a wonderfully involving and passionate performance, with resonant piano lines and tactile vocals.

It's this nuance and expression (and sense of space) that marks the Piegas out from their similarly-priced rivals. There is a lack of boxiness that at times means you completely dial them out of the equation, and get that one stage closer to what you're listening to.

## Classic by name, classic by nature?

Some people will want a little more attack from their speakers for both movies and music, especially at this price. Others will crave an overall design that draws more attention to itself. And some won't appreciate having to shop around separately for a subwoofer (I used my standard BK Electronics 12-incher). These are all factors to consider.

On the other hand, Piega's Classics have a performance that startles at times, and, combined with their benign sensitivity and superb build quality, means that for some buyers, these could be too good to miss ■

## HCC VERDICT



### Piega Classic 5.0 system

→ £3,150 → [www.piega.ch](http://www.piega.ch)

**WE SAY:** The Piegas counter a slight lack of excitement in return for levels of space and refinement that are hard to match at the price.

**2. The Classic 5.0s and 3.0s are rear-ported; the Center Large isn't**





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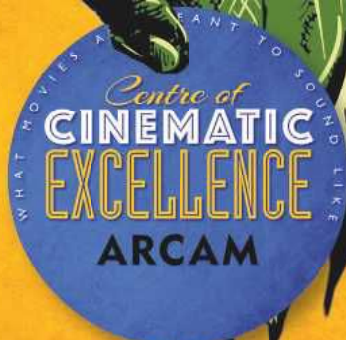
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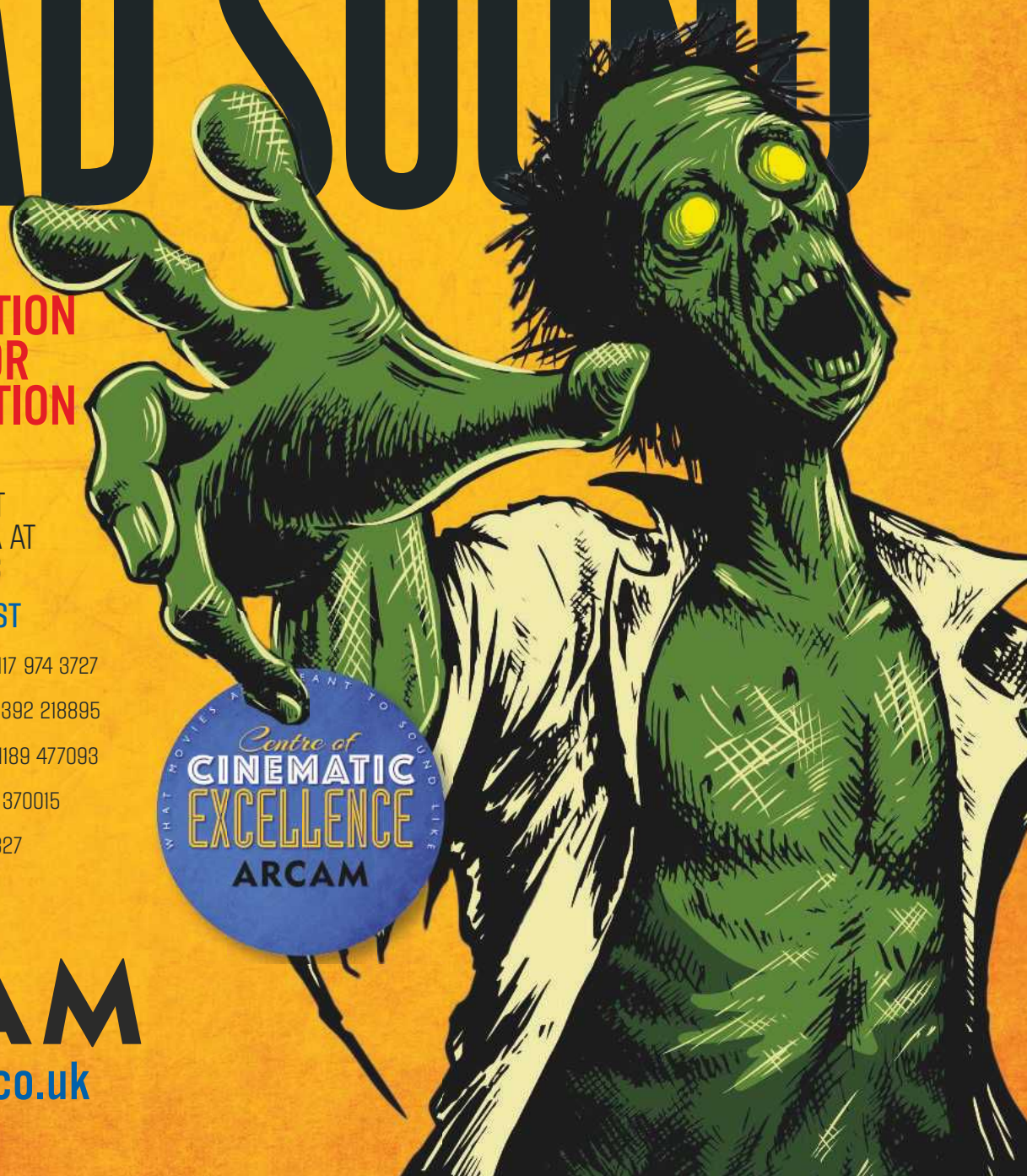
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# ARCAM

[www.arcam.co.uk](http://www.arcam.co.uk)





Q Acoustics, purveyor of high-value soundbars, has launched its first soundbase. **Steve May** takes to the M2...

# Not fashionable, definitely ferocious

Q Acoustics has made quite a name for itself with its M3 and M4 soundbars, but now it's turned its attention to the soundbase. These all-in-one TV upgrades have struggled to ape the success of their cousins, but following the launch of the Sonos Playbase, there's renewed interest in the form factor.

Like the Sonos offering (see *HCC* #273), the M2 is a neat and tidy alternative to sound planks and larger audio systems. Unlike the Playbase, there's no network connectivity (although there is a crafty workaround) or inherent multiroom functionality, but it compensates with a much more approachable ticket price.

Soundbases typically double as a plinth for the telly. But this Q Acoustics debutant is actually quite compact, so it's worth getting the measuring tape out before you buy. The





## AV INFO

**PRODUCT:**  
2.1-channel  
soundbase speaker  
with Bluetooth and  
HDMI ARC

**POSITION:**  
Debut soundbase  
from the brand

**PEERS:**  
Sonos Playbase;  
Canton DM55

**1. The M2 will support  
screens up to 25kg  
– but they'll need  
narrow feet...**

cabinet is sufficiently robust to take the weight of sets up to 25kg, although the chances of finding a 50in TV with a pedestal base that fits are slim. One possible solution would be to swap out the default TV stand for a third party VESA mount alternative, from the likes of Sanus. Smaller screen sizes (43in, etc) should be fine.

Alternatively, given it stands just 93mm tall, the M2 should easily slip onto the shelf of an AV cabinet, or sit on top, if, for example, your TV is wall-mounted.

The M2 tips the scales at a substantial 5.8kg. With rolled-off edges it doesn't quite have the cosmetic brutality of the brand's soundbar line, but it's still pretty blokey.

Rear-side connections include a single HDMI with ARC, plus an optical digital audio input and analogue stereo phonos. There's also a 3.5mm minijack. This makes it quite a versatile proposition.

The metal grille is non-removable. Behind it are a pair of front-facing 58mm x 58mm BMR (Balanced Mode Radiator) drivers, and a bass reflex port for the underside-mounted 4in x 6in dual voice-coil subwoofer. The sub is given requisite air by four isolating feet. Bass-boosting DSP is on hand if you need it, in the form of a MovieEQ function.

The M2 is refreshingly plug 'n' play. There's no auto calibration system to contend with when setting up for the first time. However, you will find two switches on the rear to optimise performance. There's a volume gain toggle, to

combat differences in loudness that Q Acoustics noted while testing the unit with various HDMI ARC connections. The other is a three-way equaliser, which needs to be set according to the position of the speaker. There's one notch for placing atop furniture, plus two in-cabinet modes depending on the height of the shelf it finds itself on. For this audition, the M2 was parked on a cabinet.

Bluetooth streaming with aptX is supported; NFC is offered for easy pairing. If you need online connectivity you can always add a Chromecast Audio puck via the minijack input; for £30 you can bring the M2 within a wireless Chromecast ecosystem.

The M2 comes with an oh-so-basic credit card remote control for power, source selection, volume and EQ toggling. If you prefer to get hands-on, the top of the unit has simple volume and source input controls.

While this soundbase has no onboard display, each source selection is confirmed by a coloured LED.

### Sticking with stereo

The M2 doesn't proffer any *faux* surround, or attempt directional wall bouncing. There's no onboard decoding for Dolby Digital or DTS either. This is an unapologetically stereophonic sound system, albeit one that combines a high dynamic output with clarity and weight. If you're after no-frills sonic excitement, you're in the right place.

The ominous techno theme opener to *Resident Evil: Afterlife* (Blu-ray) is delivered with a pulsing intensity that >



will make even undead hearts beat faster. When unsuspecting umbrella man meets his fate during the opening credits, the M2 savours the gristly bite.

Then, as Alice slices and dices her way into the Umbrella Corporation HQ, the M2 zings and whistles in delight. Bodies clunk, masonry cracks realistically. The soundbase bludgeons the room.

One characteristic of Balanced Mode Radiator speaker technology is wide dispersion. We first saw Q Acoustics use the BMR drivers on its M4 soundbar. They combine a pistonic speaker action with flatpanel technology, and offer a quite distinctive listening experience.

**'The M2 has a well-rounded bass delivery bolstered by a coherent mid-range, and offers volume to spare'**

For the most part, they do indeed create wide treble and mid-range dispersion. But this still doesn't alter the fact that the listening experience varies depending where you sit. The speaker primarily propels forward. Sitting square-on is the best place to be. Move off-axis, and the M2 sounds a smidge thicker and more congested. It's definitely worth bagging the best seat in the house.

### Turn it up!

This soundbase has volume to spare. Its power output is rated at 80W (2 x 20W for the stereo pair, with 40W going to the sub). In the real world, I rate it as more than powerful enough to fill the average living room.

When the combat begins in *Edge of Tomorrow* (Blu-ray), the M2 is up for the battle. The mechanical clanks and wheezes of Tom Cruise's Exosuit are crisp and convincing, and his feet land with heavy, clumping weight. When his

### SPECIFICATIONS

**DRIVE UNITS:** 2 x 58mm x 58mm BMR (Balanced Mode Radiator) drivers; 1 x dual voice coil 4in x 6in bass driver **AMPLIFICATION:** 80W (2 x 20W, plus 40W for the woofer) **CONNECTIONS:** HDMI ARC; optical digital audio input; 3.5mm audio input; stereo analogue audio input **DOLBY TRUEHD/DTS-HD MA:** No **SEPARATE SUBWOOFER:** No **REMOTE CONTROL:** Yes **DIMENSIONS:** 550(w) x 93(h) x 338(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 5.8kg

**FEATURES:** MoviEQ mode; aptX Bluetooth with NFC pairing; volume gain compensation; location adjustment; USB input (service port); rated for 25kg screens; 340Hz crossover

### PARTNER WITH



**CHROMECAST AUDIO:** Available for £30 (or maybe less), this networking dongle hooks up to a speaker via 3.5mm, and uses Wi-Fi to stream audio from compatible apps on your phone/tablet/laptop. An inexpensive upgrade for the Q Acoustics M2.

troop transport takes flight, the chopper blades whump loudly from right to left. The stereo presentation isn't overt, but it's just about wide enough. His first jump is a satisfying cacophony of metallic collisions, alien trills and rapid-fire weaponry. Despite all this, dialogue is kept clean and clear. There's no unwanted sibilance.

The M2 drops to 30Hz, which in itself is impressive, but it doesn't really unload to 100Hz. This means there's a sense of depth and weight to the soundstage, but no real visceral slam. It's not able to do the same job as a 2.1 system with dedicated subwoofer, but it does have a well-rounded delivery bolstered by a coherent mid-range. If you don't want to sacrifice floor space to a 2.1 system, then this is a compromise you'll probably be comfortable making.

While the M2 likes to get rowdy, I wouldn't describe it as particularly musical. It has energy and bounce, but not too much refinement. And that limited stage width is noticeable. Lou Reed's *Berlin* (Blu-ray), a live performance of the now classic album, proves revealing. With the much-covered *Caroline Says*, Reed's vocal performance is emotive and to the fore; the band surrounds but doesn't impinge. But it isn't a spacious presentation. There's barely room for the backing choir.

I also noted an occasional rasp from the trumpet, but the chances of this ever being an irritant are slim to none. Unless you have a particularly impressive Herb Alpert CD collection...

### Effective upgrade

While the M2 is unlikely to win over fashionistas, there's no doubting its value for money. It offers a big cinematic sound from a small, relatively inexpensive cabinet. Tonally, it's smooth, and if you like bombastic action, it doesn't disappoint. BMR drivers are a bit different from the norm, and take a little getting used to. An effective TV upgrade ■

**2. The 4in x 6in woofer can be seen through the grille on the soundbase's belly**



### HCC VERDICT



#### Q Acoustics M2

→ £300 → [www.qacoustics.co.uk](http://www.qacoustics.co.uk)

**WE SAY:** Compact but uncowed, the M2 is a brilliant-value TV audio upgrade. It's not particularly musical, but it excites with cinematic action and games.



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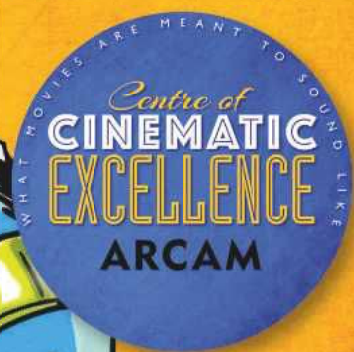
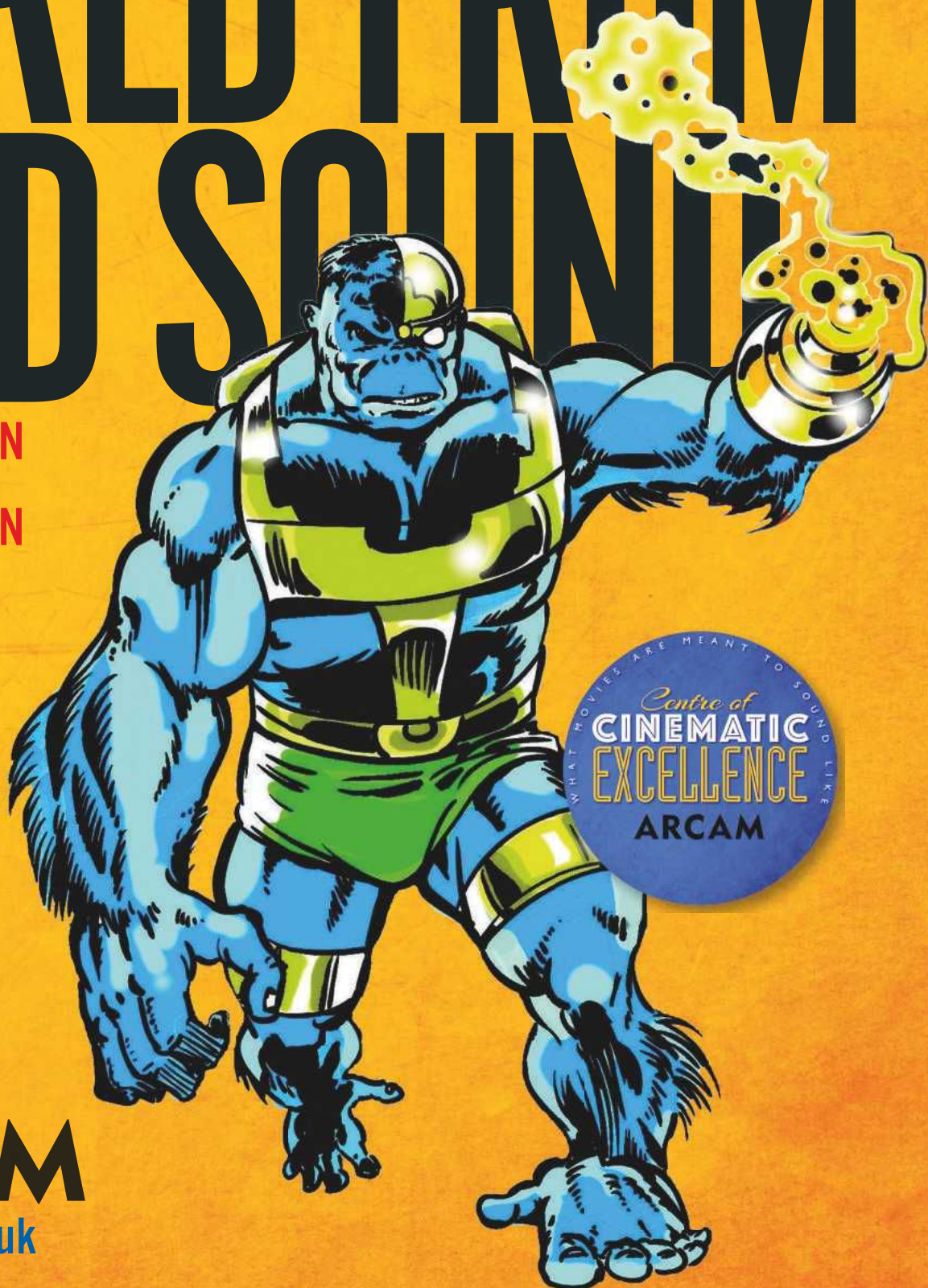
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# ARCAM

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**John Archer** finds innovation alive and well in Panasonic's latest high-end LCD TV

# How to tame your backlight

## HOT BOTS

*Transformers: The Last Knight* cuts a fine figure in 4K, p94





LCD TVs have a problem. OLED models are stealing their thunder when it comes to black levels, and with HDR entering the frame (literally) it's become more and more obvious. The technology uses external lights to illuminate pixels, meaning that during dark scenes, viewers are often faced with haloes around bright objects, stray bars of light or swathes of greyed-out image. It can put a real dampener on movie night.

Panasonic's TX-65EX750 aims to tackle this problem head on. The TV brand has a proud tradition of innovating in the LCD backlight space, and the 65EX750 continues that theme with a feature described as 'digitally enhanced local dimming'. The 'digitally enhanced' part uses a new shuttering system to angle its liquid crystals, so that they can receive more or less light as per the demands of the picture. The local dimming part, more traditionally, enables different segments of the TV's edge-mounted LEDs to output different levels of light. Let's hope it works.

## Fully featured

This is a 4K TV (natch), with smart features coming courtesy of Panasonic's attractive, easy to use Home Screen 2.0 platform. Apps include the 4K and HDR versions of Amazon and Netflix, as well as the UK's key terrestrial channel catch-up services via built-in Freeview Play.

It's quite a good looker, with neat, slim silver bezel, and is supplied with a gleaming stand that allows the chassis to swivel to target different viewing positions. Smaller EX750 models add a 'lift' function, letting you raise the screen's height.

There are the usual connections: four HDMI's, a trio of USBs (with associated recording function), and Wi-Fi/LAN network options. Last year's DX750 range only featured two HDCP 2.2-capable HDMI inputs. Thankfully, such support is now offered across the board, although I found that only HDMI's 1 and 2 support 4:4:4 colour.

As you'd expect with a relatively premium LCD TV in 2017, the 65EX750 caters for HDR and HLG high dynamic range formats. It should also gain support for Samsung's open-standard dynamic metadata HDR10+ system via a future firmware update.

The TV isn't especially bright by HDR TV standards, though. I could only get around 500 nits out of it when using a 10 per cent white HDR window. That's barely a third of the peak brightness you can get from Sony's XE9305 TVs for instance, and is even 200 nits less than Panasonic's OLEDs.

On the upside, the Panasonic can maintain that 500 nits for a protracted time versus rival screens; handy when watching consistently bright HDR content such as *Planet Earth II*.

The relatively low peak luminance likely helps the set's digitally enhanced local dimming technology do a superb job of limiting unwanted backlight artefacts. Even with extremely bright objects against near-black backdrops, such as the lights of Iron Man's suit when he talks to Peter Parker after rescuing him in the *Spider-Man: Homecoming* 4K Blu-ray, there's scarcely a trace of the light blooms or bands around the bright areas that you might have feared.

The level of precision isn't the same as you'll witness with OLED technology. Nor is there that almost luminous dynamism you get from OLED's ability to put a peak white pixel right next to a pitch black one with no compromise across the two. But the 65EX750 is much cheaper than any 65in OLED, and by LCD standards its light management during dark scenes is first-rate.

This is far from the 65EX750's only area of picture strength. Its colours, for instance, are for the most part excellent. It deploys the same new-for-2017 Studio Master HCX2 processing system found on Panasonic's outstanding 2017 OLED TVs, and uses the advanced, semi-professional '3D Look Up Table' approach to rendering colours.

As a result *Spider-Man's* suit showcases subtle variances in red, and skin tones look natural. There's more fine colour detail in backgrounds of *Homecoming's* shots across New York, too, and there's some really strong management of low-lit colours in dark scenes. Worries that the 65EX750's relatively low brightness might lead to excessively muted wide colour gamut effects and detail crushing in dark areas amount to zilch.

Not surprisingly, this flatscreen's finessed colour reproduction leads into a crisp, detailed performance with 4K images.

While *...Homecoming* isn't the hands-down sharpest 4K title I've seen (we'll have a full review next issue), some sequences – particularly those in Vulture's lab – really ram the 4K pixel-push home. And the 65EX750 confidently extracts every last drop of info, be it the lines on Michael Keaton's face, or the minute textures of all the alien tech that's lying around.

The 65EX750's processing prowess also makes it a superior

## AV INFO

**PRODUCT:**  
65in 4K HDR TV with edge LED lighting/ local dimming

**POSITION:**  
Premium among Panasonic's new LCD TVs for 2017

**PEERS:**  
Sony 65XE9005; Samsung UE65MU9000

**1. The EX750 lineup also includes 50in, 58in and 75in models**

**2. Panasonic's 'Swivel Design' stand makes angling the TV easy**

**3. A silver remote for a silver-framed telly**



upscaler of HD sources, adding tangible pixel depth and clarity to HD images without creating exaggerated edges or grain.

There are a couple of things that can diminish the set's usually excellent detailing, though. First, when a TV only has 500 nits or so of peak luminance to work with, it inevitably won't be able to render every subtle tone in the brightest parts of HDR content that's mastered to 1,000 nits and beyond. With the ...*Homecoming* disc,

**'The local-dimming engine impresses - there's scarcely a trace of light blooms or bands around bright objects'**

this includes the sun setting behind the bridge while Spider-Man sits on a balcony with a view of New York City behind him.

Having said that, the 65EX750 does a better job of 'remapping' peak luminance detailing to its screen's capabilities than some brighter rivals – more evidence of the strength of the Studio Master HCX2 platform.

The other thing that can cost this set a little 4K sharpness is motion. With its motion processing system turned off, objects can look slightly more juddery than they ideally would. Yet if you use Panasonic's Intelligent Frame Creation processing to reduce the judder, it can cause a few unwanted side effects, such as slight shimmering around Spidey as he sprints and swings through a row of suburban gardens, fences and hedges.

The difficulties finding a motion handling 'sweet spot' among the 65EX750's settings also apply to its handling of contrast. If you set the TV's Adaptive Dimming setting on its maximum level, you get really strong black levels and minimal backlight clouding – but peak brightness is reduced to around 400 nits. Reducing the Adaptive Dimming to Medium gets you to 500 nits, but dark areas look much greyer.

### Dynamic dilemma

Perhaps the single strangest quirk of the 65EX750's pictures is the way they only really look good if you use the set's Dynamic picture preset.

With all other Panasonic TVs you

### SPECIFICATIONS

**3D:** Yes. Active shutter **4K:** Yes. 3,840 x 2,160 **HDR:** Yes. HLG; HDR10; HDR10+ (via future update) **TUNER:** Yes. Freeview HD; Freesat HD **CONNECTIONS:** 4 x HDMI inputs; 3 x USB; RF input; optical digital audio output; composite video input; headphone output; Ethernet **SOUND:** 20W **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** N/A **CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):** N/A **DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND):** 1,457(w) x 841(h) x 52(d)mm **WEIGHT (OFF STAND):** 39kg

**FEATURES:** Wi-Fi; USB multimedia playback; DLNA; Studio Master HCX2 engine; digitally enhanced local dimming system; Home Screen 2.0 smart engine; Swivel Design stand; Dynamic, Normal, Cinema, True Cinema and Custom image presets

### PARTNER WITH



**PANASONIC DMP-UB400:** Now available for around £230, this 4K player (with Wi-Fi streaming talents) represents an affordable upgrade to the world of UHD Blu-ray. The smallscale chassis makes it easy to accommodate, too.

generally get the best results with the company's Cinema or True Cinema settings, but all the 65EX750's non-Dynamic presets suffer with an aggravating problem: inconsistent colours.

Tones on the left and right side of the screen often seem to be infused with a subtle yellow undertone. This is particularly apparent with the screen-filling rich red of the Marvel Studios logo, as a good few inches of the left and right sides of the image lose some of their red lustre. But you can also see the problem in more typical video content.

It's all pretty odd, and suggests that something about Panasonic's digitally enhanced local dimming system needs to be driven hard to deliver its best results.

Audio quality is a disappointment. Bass is too thin to sound convincing with your typical movie, and the mid-range is surprisingly weak too, sometimes leaving dialogue sounding artificial and dislocated from the pictures.

In an ideal world, I'd be able to wrap up this review by testing the 65EX750's 3D playback – a feature supported by practically no other TV this year. Tragically, if tellingly, Panasonic couldn't find a single pair of

the active shutter 3D glasses I'd have needed to test its 3D capabilities. Sigh.

### Welcome stability

Panasonic's 65EX750 isn't perfect. It could do with a bit more peak brightness, the colour inconsistency discussed above is strange, and motion handling is outdone by rivals. On the other hand, not having your HDR viewing routinely affected on an LCD TV by distracting backlight clouds and bands is a trick that never grows old ■

### HCC VERDICT



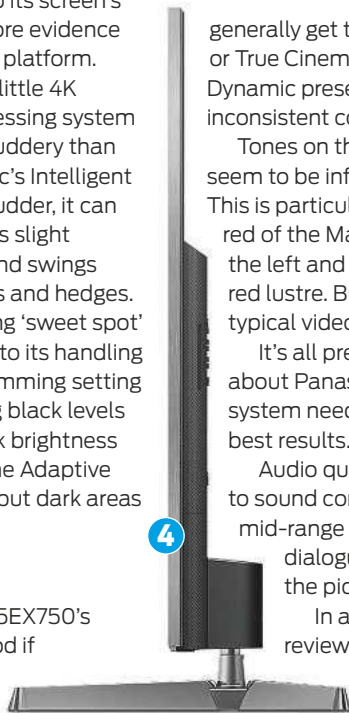
#### Panasonic TX-65EX750

→ £1,900 → [www.panasonic.co.uk](http://www.panasonic.co.uk)


**WE SAY:** Although it's certainly not perfect and needs careful setup, the new backlight system is a revelation, and 3D playback will find this set fans.

**4. The stand adds another 4.5kg of weight to the package**

**5. Pop-off rear panels hide the TV's inputs and outputs**







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# Back in the game

While **John Archer** is glad to see the return of Toshiba to the UK TV marketplace, this affordable 49in 4K set doesn't exactly set his pulse racing



**THE FIRST TOSHIBA-BRANDED** TV for three years immediately sets out the brand's new (Vestel-owned) stall with its £500 price. This gets you a 49in native 4K TV with built-in smart hub features that include Netflix, YouTube (both in 4K) and even the Freeview Play portal.

Before you rush off to the shops, though, there are a couple of things you should probably know. First, very unusually for a

4K TV in 2017, the 49U6763DB doesn't support high dynamic range. Second, it's not very good.

Looking at the lack of HDR first, you might be surprised to hear that I don't necessarily consider this a bad thing on a budget TV. HDR can suffer if it isn't given solid basic picture strengths to

work with, so I'm perfectly on board with a £500 TV accepting its limitations and leaving HDR at the door.

Unfortunately, though, the 49U6763DB's limitations affect SDR performance too. By far the biggest issue is a lack of contrast. There's precious little punch with bright content, and it's sub-par when it comes to black levels. Dark scenes such as a night-time shoot-out in the *Baby Driver* 4K Blu-ray appear behind a distracting wash of grey that mutes colours and crushes out shadow detail. It doesn't help, either, that *Baby Driver*'s darkest shots reveal clouding at the image's edges.

Toshiba provides a few contrast-based settings options, including a multi-level dynamic contrast mode, various picture presets, and, of course, a basic brightness adjustment. So entrenched are the black level limitations, though, that no tweaks really make much difference.

The lack of contrast also weakens the TV's 4K claims. Contrast management plays a

## SPECIFICATIONS

**3D:** No **4K:** Yes, 3,840 x 2,160 **HDR:** No  
**TUNER:** Yes, Freeview HD  
**CONNECTIONS:** 4 x HDMI inputs; 3 x USB; Scart; Ethernet; D-Sub PC; component video; optical digital audio output; headphone output **SOUND:** 2 x 10W  
**BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** N/A **CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):** N/A **DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND):** 1,099(w) x 650(h) x 100(d)mm  
**WEIGHT (OFF STAND):** 14.3kg

**FEATURES:** Wi-Fi; USB/networked media playback; dynamic contrast system; noise reduction; Miracast; Freeview Play; VOD

significant role in perceived detail and sharpness, so the lack of it here makes it harder to really appreciate 4K's advantages.

Also damaging to the screen's perception of sharpness is the occasional appearance of colour striping, due, presumably, to the screen not having the processing chops to resolve subtle colour blends smoothly.

## On the other hand

There are areas where the 49U6763DB's pictures are decent. *Baby Driver*'s car chases, for instance, reveal better motion handling than you get with most budget TVs. There's neither the motion blur nor judder you might have expected. Also, skin tones generally look surprisingly convincing given the often 'flat' look of other colours.

When upscaling HD sources to its 4K resolution, the Toshiba doesn't make them look much subjectively sharper, but at least it doesn't exaggerate grain or source noise.

The set's unusually chunky, plasticky (though not actually unattractive) bodywork also delivers a slightly better sound performance than some budget sets.

Dynamic range and raw power are both limited enough to result in a slightly muffled tone during *Baby Driver*'s frequent thumping songs. However, trebles don't sound harsh, and the speakers and chassis never succumb to putting or rattling.

Hopes that Vestel might revive the beloved Toshiba in an instant blaze of glory haven't come to pass with this model; hopefully step-up sets (the U77 and forthcoming OLEDs) will perform better.

Yes, the 49U6763DB is affordable. But if you're going to invest in 4K around this size, it might be worth saving up a bit longer for more quality ■

## AV INFO

**PRODUCT:**  
Affordable 49in 4K TV (not HDR)

**POSITION:**  
The entry-level 4K model in Toshiba's new range

**PEERS:**  
Samsung UE49MU6200;  
Hisense H50N6800

## HCC VERDICT



**Toshiba 49U6763DB**

→ £500 → [www.toshiba-tv.com](http://www.toshiba-tv.com)

**WE SAY:** While we appreciate the 49U6763DB's aggressively priced attempt to make 4K more mainstream, it doesn't win us over.



serie **C70** 75"/65"/55"  
**4K UHD TV**



The Creative Life



AN EXCEPTIONAL PICTURE  
DESERVES AN EXCEPTIONAL SOUND





Luxury projection brand SIM2 delivers its first 4K projector. **John Archer** finds out if it's worth remortgaging for

# It's DLP 4K, but not as we know it

For a mixture of technical and licensing reasons, DLP projectors have taken longer than most to board the 4K bandwagon. Happily, they're now arriving thick and fast, from brands including Acer, BenQ and Optoma. Yet none seen to date is quite like the SIM2 Nero 4 UHD. Others have tended to push the price of 4K projection downwards; this comes to market carrying a £30,000 ticket.





## AV INFO

**PRODUCT:**  
Premium single-chip  
4K DLP projector  
with HDR support

**POSITION:**  
SIM2's only 4K PJ,  
but it does sell more  
expensive three-chip  
Full HD models

**PEERS:**  
JVC DLA-Z1;  
Sony VPL-VW760ES

at handling high dynamic range (HDR) content, because HDR's greed for brightness is causing the projection world headaches aplenty. Surely 5000 Lumens should be enough to make HDR look right? Especially given that the Nero 4 UHD can adjust its picture settings depending on the size of your screen, in recognition of the fact that bigger images require more luminance.

The industry standard HDR10 is supported out of the box, and the PJ will be upgraded for HLG when that broadcast-friendly HDR format goes live.

To help address the wider colour spectrums generally associated with HDR content, SIM2 claims to have coated the Nero 4 UHD's optical components in 'special' substances (it won't reveal exactly what) to enhance colour performance.

When it comes to delivering 4K playback, it employs an ultra-fine lens, precise enough to deliver flawless resolution up to 93 lines per millimetre, I'm told, and a 'double flashing' system to deliver a perceived 4K resolution (ratified as real 4K by the Consumer Electronics Association) from its DLP array of pixel 'mirrors'.

The Nero 4 UHD goes beyond most projectors with its connections. In particular, there are three HDMI inputs (although only one is built to the 4K/HDR-friendly v2.0a standard, which seems a bit odd) and a v1.2 Display Port. There are also a host of system integration connections: two 12V trigger outputs, two IR receivers, an Ethernet port, and RS-232. After all, anyone buying this SIM2 will have it professionally installed – a fact further supported by the projector's in-built compatibility with the Live Colours Calibration 2.0 software package.

An installer may also take advantage of the Nero 4 UHD's motorised zoom/focus system and lens memory function to support playback of different aspect ratios without needing external lens attachments.

Two final key features of the Nero 4 UHD are that it supports 3D (though SIM2 didn't supply any glasses for testing), and that it only uses a single 4K DLP chip.

Most previous high-end models from the brand have featured three (RGB) HD DLP digital mirror devices, avoiding the colour wheel element required by single-chip DLP projectors. Images have therefore usually been gloriously free of the motion fizzing, dark area-speckling and 'rainbow' striping issues that colour wheels can cause. Unfortunately, moving to a single-chip/colour wheel solution with the Nero 4 UHD means it suffers with clear rainbowning, especially (but not exclusively) when watching HDR sources.

Different people have different tolerance to the rainbow effect. The brightness of the Nero 4's pictures, though, means rainbowning will likely prove at least a little distracting to just about everyone from time to time during contrast-rich scenes – such as those in the *Power Rangers*' underground HQ on the *Power Rangers Ultra HD* BD.

## Bright star

SIM2's high-end beast is on much firmer ground with other aspects of its performance. For starters, it usually delivers bright HDR scenes with more authenticity, sheer luminance and punch than any other HDR projector I've tested – including JVC's Z1 laser model.

The sun-drenched HDR vistas peppered throughout *Planet Earth II* on 4K Blu-ray, for

Pricy, then, and immediately positioned against the likes of JVC's DLA-Z1 and above Sony's VPL-VW760ES.

The Nero 4 UHD stands out from the more affordable 4K DLP projector crowd with its premium optics, stunning 'crystal' design (which makes its angular black bodywork look like it's encased in glass), and ultra-high claimed brightness output of 5,000 Lumens.

This brightness makes it far better equipped than most (3,000 Lumens or less) projectors for driving very large screens in mid/large cinema rooms. Plus, hopefully, it will make the Nero 4 UHD better than any other DLP projector

**1. A brightness rating of 5,000 Lumens makes the PJ suited to large screens**

**2. The Nero 4 UHD is more than half a metre wide and weighs 32kg**





## SPECIFICATIONS

**3D:** Yes. Active 3D **4K:** Yes. 3,840 x 2,160 **HDR:** Yes. HDR10 (HLG via future update)  
**CONNECTIONS:** 3 x HDMI inputs (1 x v2.0a, 2 x v1.4a); 2 x 12V triggers; Display Port;  
 Ethernet; USB for firmware update; RS-232; 2 x IR ports **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):**  
 5,000 Lumens **CONTRAST (CLAIMED):** N/A **ZOOM:** 1.8x **DIMENSIONS:** 528(w) x 197(h)  
 x 525(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 32kg

**FEATURES:** Single-chip DLP projector; auto pic adjust based on screen size; 3,000  
 hours estimated lamp life (Eco mode); 450W lamp; 12-aperture adjustable iris; lens  
 memory; pure glass lens with 93 lines per mm resolution; motorised zoom and  
 focus; 1.36:2.68:1 throw ratio; Live Colors Calibration 2 software; vertical (+/-75%)  
 and horizontal (+/- 30%) lens shift; Crystal Glass cabinet

## PARTNER WITH



**ARCAM AVR850:** Anyone  
 investing in SIM2's Nero 4  
 UHD will want a premium  
 audio performance to go  
 with it. Arcam's flagship  
 seven-channel AVR (£4,500)  
 delivers high-fidelity sonics,  
 Dirac room EQ, and  
 11-channel processing.

3

instance, look astonishingly life-like. The Nero 4 UHD gets closer to the light levels we experience with our eyes in the real world. With this impressive – and maintained – brightness level comes a palpable sense of extra colour vibrancy and insight, when a source combines HDR's dynamism with a wide colour gamut. *Planet Earth II*'s flora and fauna look stunning.

The projector also delivers spectacularly on the advantages of 4K. Ultra-detailed 4K discs such as *Sully* appear exquisitely sharp, clean and full of the sort of texture and depth that only 4K can deliver.

**'The sun-drenched HDR vistas peppered throughout *Planet Earth II* on 4K Blu-ray look astonishingly life-like'**

Sharpness feels natural, and detail holds up during camera pans and fast-paced action, thanks to some supremely effective and discreet motion handling. Even Peter Jackson's rapid swirls around the Dwarf halls near the start of *The Hobbit* (Blu-ray) are handled without unnatural judder or blur – despite the fact that these HD shots are being upscaled to 4K by SIM2's processing.

## Time to tweak

While the Nero 4 UHD mostly rocks with its handling of bright HDR and SDR content, things aren't so rosy with dark scenes, or shots containing a mix of dark and light content. Initially, such content appeared both rather greyed-over and almost devoid of detail. When the Power Rangers first enter their underground cave, for instance, initially I could barely make out the background rock walls.

The only way to resolve this via the projector's settings was to ramp up the brightness. But doing this also dialled down the already compromised black level response.

SIM2 provided a bizarre solution: a series of settings adjustments (boosting brightness but reducing contrast) for my Oppo UDP-203 4K Blu-ray player. Normally you'd expect to be able to adjust a display device to work around

playback issues, but the brand wants you to tweak at source (and alternative setup advice is available for other 4K Blu-ray players, too).

Adjusting the Oppo's output had a transformative effect on the Nero 4 UHD's HDR performance, returning shadow detail to dark areas without excessively raising general black level performance, and making areas of light and shade in mixed-brightness images seem much better balanced.

I still felt a touch short of brightness when watching HDR – a rather terrifying discovery given the Nero 4 UHD's 5,000 Lumens rating. It still felt, too, as if SIM2 has had to sacrifice some of its traditional black level depth (with all content) to handle HDR, and nothing I did fully solved the previously mentioned rainbowning. But the source tweaks resulted in an HDR image that was more enjoyable and easier to become immersed in.

Unfortunately, though, there seems to be a limit to how far the Nero 4 UHD can go even when working in tandem with your BD deck. With a 4K title that's been mastered at 4,000 nits (such as *Pan*) areas of peak colour and brightness glowed quite unnaturally in the context of the image around them, as well as falling prey to fizzing noise. There was also clipping in the brightest picture areas, with the projector unable to fully translate subtle peak light details to its lower brightness capabilities.

SIM2 has told me that it hopes to fix these issues via future firmware updates. I can only ultimately review what's put in front of me, however, but do wonder if a high-spec processor, such as Lumagen's Radiance Pro (see *HCC* #263) might be a suitable partner to help fine-tune performance. The Nero 4 UHD is capable with some content of delivering exquisite 4K HDR pictures, but needs to adapt itself to the many different source challenges out there in the Wild HDR West ■

## HCC VERDICT



### SIM2 Nero 4 UHD

→ £30,000 → [www.sim2.com/home/uk](http://www.sim2.com/home/uk)

**WE SAY:** Breathtaking with bright imagery, razor-sharp, and a maestro with motion, but there's work to be done on how well the Nero 4 UHD adapts to the full gamut of HDR content.

**3. SIM2's 'pure glass' lens promises unrivalled 4K image clarity**



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# The Gamesmaster

Optoma's latest Full HD DLP movie and gaming projector costs more than much of the competition, but makes up for it by being fraggin' great, claims **Steve May**

**IF YOU WANT** to supersize games as well as movies, Optoma's HD39Darbee could be the projector to shoot for. Whether you want to hookup a Nintendo Switch or chow down with corn chips and a freshly delivered Blu-ray, this well-specified beamer merits an audition.

It's not one of the new breed of 4K DLP projectors, nor HDR capable, but still has features that ensure a wide appeal.

First, the design. A single-chip DLP model, the £900 HD39Darbee is small but perfectly formed. As we've come to expect from Optoma, build quality is solid, while cosmetic design is functional yet contemporary.

AV connections comprise two v1.4a HDMI inputs (one MHL-enabled for smartphone use), plus an audio minijack output. There's also a USB-A power port, useful if you want to run a streaming media player dongle (Fire TV stick, Google Chromecast, Roku) into one of the HDMI's.

A 12V trigger is provided for screen integration, although at this price point it probably won't find many

takers (but we applaud its provision). A 3D Sync port offers support for optional 3D glasses.

As the PJ's moniker proclaims, there's Darbee Visual Presence image processing onboard. If you've seen Darbee implemented before, be it on previous Optoma projectors, a standalone processor or Blu-ray player, there's no change here. It features three presets: Gaming, Full Pop and Hi-Def, each with variable strength.

The process, in a nutshell, applies various levels of picture enhancement – white highlights typically get lifted, contrasty edges are given sharper definition, nuanced shadowed areas are smoothed out for cleaner colour. The application is sometimes quite subtle, at other times all too obvious.

Deciding if any of this is genuinely beneficial is rather more challenging than you might imagine. To help identify the impact it's having, there are demo modes which either split the screen or illustrate with a scrolling wipe.

As is standard on a multimedia projector, the HD39Darbee carries an integrated speaker system (rated at 10W) which provides a functional level of audio. It's worth ensuring that your source outputs PCM. If the projector gets a Dolby Digital bitstream, easily done with Blu-ray player or set-top box, it results in a rather nasty rasping sound.



## AV INFO

**PRODUCT:**  
Full HD projector  
with Darbee  
processing

**POSITION:**  
Below Optoma's 4K  
models, above the  
HD27 and HD29

**PEERS:**  
BenQ W1120;  
Epson EH-TW650



The projector doesn't take long to get up and running. Aiding you are a 1.6x zoom, a vertical lens shift offering 17 per cent play, and keystone correction. A test pattern grid makes it easy to get focus right. Basic image parameter adjustments include brightness, colour, contrast and sharpness. There's also variable gamma (in addition to content presets, you'll find selectable 1.8, 2 and 2.4); colour management (and ISF modes); and Dynamic Black. Engaging the latter bumps contrast, but brings with it a hike in operational noise.

## Lamp it up

The HD39Darbee is a definite light cannon, making Optoma's 3,500 Lumens brightness rating believable. Whether you'll need all the luminance on tap depends on your environment. If you have control over light in your viewing room, the Eco lamp setting is the best option, extending claimed lamp life and dropping running noise to a moderately low 29dB. With ambient light the Bright setting comes into its own. Of course, with the projector at full beam, the internal fan predictably goes into overdrive.

Picture quality is immediately impressive. As with all single-chippers, Full HD images appear razor-sharp. With no panel alignment to contend with, DLP can offer almost clinical precision.

Black level performance is on the right side of acceptable; indeed, I was impressed by the tonal integrity of the image. A letterboxed HD presentation of *The Victors*, an episodic monochrome war melodrama from 1963, highlights the expansive greyscale – fatigues, skin tones, forests and mud all look convincingly cinematic. Black-and-white movies are a great revealer of DLP's rainbow fringing trait, but significantly I was not aware of intrusive rainbowning in areas of high contrast.

Letterbox bars do retain an element of greyness, but there's enough contrast to give images solidity.

The projector covers the REC.709 colour space, and vibrancy is high. When Tom Hanks is being chased down by Somali pirates in *Captain Phillips* (Blu-ray), the pursuing

**'This Optoma gets the balance right. It convinces with movies but is also a fast, colourful gaming display'**

skiff is buffeted in the wake of the ship. The glistening sea and blue-sky backdrop look glorious, without the image feeling over-saturated.

Of course, the HD39 can dazzle when it wants to. The multicoloured fandango that is *Strictly Come Dancing* becomes a whirlwind of colour. Reds just about resist tangoing into orange, blues pop and sequins shine appropriately.

So what of Darbee processing? Previous experience suggests it can be an unpredictable benefit, dependent on source. Here, having watched a sizeable swathe of *Captain Phillips* at normal viewing distance, with Darbee in Hi-Def mode, the Optoma's picture definitely seemed to lose snap when it was switched off. Darbee proves particularly beneficial on projected skin tones, and sharpened up Tom Hanks' spectacles no end.

As well as offering Darbee, this PJ wants to woo gamers with its brightness and low-latency, and it succeeds.

## SPECIFICATIONS

**3D:** Yes. Active 3D (glasses optional) **4K:** No. 1,920 x 1,080 **HDR:** No **CONNECTIONS:** 2 x HDMI (v1.4a); USB-A (power); 3.5mm audio output; 12V trigger; 3D Sync port **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** 3,500 Lumens **CONTRAST (CLAIMED):** 32,000:1 **Zoom:** 1.6x **DIMENSIONS:** 314(w) x 114(h) x 224(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 2.8kg

**FEATURES:** Single-chip DLP image engine; 10W built-in audio; claimed lamp-life of 10,000 hours (Eco)/4,000 hours (Bright); 29dB fan noise (Eco); Cinema, Vivid, Game, Bright and User picture presets; 1.4-2.24:1 throw ratio; test pattern grid for setup; vertical keystone correction; MHL support; Darbee Visual Presence processing; Enhanced Gaming Mode; Dynamic Black; auto power off

## PARTNER WITH



**AMAZON FIRE TV STICK:** Now with Alexa voice skills integrated, this £40 Wi-Fi-streaming HDMI dongle ushers in a world of movie/TV apps, plus games and media players. Use the Optoma PJ's powered USB port to keep it juiced.

Fast-paced Battle Royale shooter *Fortnite* looks tremendous. Played on a PS4, the clarity and vividness of the image was striking. Bright, crisp visuals plastered 100in across aren't just eye candy – they make taking pot shots at rival players on the horizon a good deal easier than on a flatscreen half the size.

The Optoma's Enhanced Gaming mode claims a 16ms response time on 1080p60 content. However, I didn't experience latency issues in the regular Gaming mode, either. There was never a sense that joypad controls weren't responding as fast as they should.

*Fortnite* has a somewhat cartoony style, but the projector also looked pristine with the more photo-realistic visuals of *Star Wars: Battlefront 2*. Colours pop, details ping, and there is more than enough contrast to emphasise image depth.

There is a dedicated Darbee mode for Gaming, but I could spot no obvious visual difference when playing a frenetic shooter. Its influence is far more evident on traditional video content.

Although the HD39Darbee lacks specific image interpolation modes, motion handling is actually rather good. With a moving HD resolution pattern, subjective detail held out to around 800 lines. There are no image processing artefacts to speak of; pans are judder-free, if a little blurry. Consequently, the HD39Darbee is a good option for sports fans.

## Convincing, compact

Often with a bright multi-purpose media-room style PJ there's a level of compromise, be it in colour fidelity or operating noise. This Optoma gets the presentational balance about right. It looks convincing with movies but is also a fast, colourful gaming display. And the compact form factor is very convenient ■

**1. The PJ's 1.6x zoom and focus are tweaked via manual rings on the lens housing**

**2. Like the projector, the handset is compact, too**

## HCC VERDICT



**Optoma HD39Darbee**

→ £900 → [www.optoma.co.uk](http://www.optoma.co.uk)

**WE SAY:** This entertaining all-purpose movie and games projector is cinematic when it needs to be, but offers low-lag gaming too. Darbee processing proves a welcome extra.

# Light up your life

HDR doesn't really shine on this Philips 6000 series 4K cheapie, says **Steve May**, but there are other elements here that catch the eye



**WITH THIS LATEST** 6000 series offering, Philips has thrown the gauntlet down to rivals fighting for trolley action in the budget UHD TV aisles. Not only does this 43-incher offer 4K resolution and HDR compatibility, plus a trendy Freeview Play tuner, it's throwing in Ambilight as a deal clincher. On paper at least, the 43PUS6262 looks a winner.

The finish and stand may be lightweight, but the thin-bezel design is smart enough and connectivity (three HDMI, Ethernet, Wi-Fi, optical digital audio, etc) covers the basics.

## AV INFO

**PRODUCT:** 43in 4K HDR TV with Ambilight

**POSITION:** Actually one of Philips' mid-range sets, above 5000 and 4000 series

**PEERS:** Toshiba 43U6763; Hisense H43N5700

Freeview Play guarantees all key catch-up TV services via its EPG. There's also a generic smart hub with Netflix, YouTube and Amazon apps, amongst others. Netflix caters for 4K HDR, while Amazon and YouTube support 4K.

Image quality is generally impressive, but inevitably there are caveats. On a screen this small, the true benefits of UHD picture resolution are not going to be discernible at a typical viewing distance. Still, the sheer pixel density brings a pleasing smoothness to both Full HD and UHD sources.

HDR support is a pyrrhic attraction, because the set isn't intrinsically bright. I measured peak white luminance, in a 5 per cent window, at just over 350 nits, which is little different from what you would find on a comparable SDR model.

A consequence is that with HDR content, the screen appears to drag down the overall picture level, giving quite a dull image. Watch *Star Trek Discovery* (Netflix), and you certainly won't see the show's HDR lens flare and lighting effects in all their glory.

Select SDR, though, and the set behaves rather differently. Standard dynamic range pictures are crisp and bright.

There are also issues with the set's limited black level and lost near-black detail. But again this is easier to accept on a

## SPECIFICATIONS

**3D:** No **4K:** Yes. 3,840 x 2,160 **HDR:** Yes. HDR10 **TUNER:** Yes. Freeview Play HD; HD satellite **CONNECTIONS:** 3 x HDMI with HDCP 2.2; optical digital audio; Ethernet; component AV; 2 x USB **SOUND:** 20W **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** 350 cd/m2 **CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):** N/A **DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND):** 971.3(w) x 575.17(h) x 77.3(d)mm **WEIGHT (OFF STAND):** 8.7kg

**FEATURES:** Built-in Wi-Fi; DLNA multimedia playback; Miracast; two-sided Ambilight; Pixel Plus UHD image processor

The 6000 series is Philips' entry-point for Ambilight

low-cost screen. A word of caution: the screen itself is reflective, which can impact contrast and clarity in a brightly light room, so plan accordingly.

Motion handling is a bit of a blunt trauma. Standard, Smooth and Sports presets all introduce unwanted motion artefacts. For movies, select the Off function if you want to keep films looking cinematic.

All these criticisms need to be balanced against the provision of Ambilight, which even in its basic two-sided guise is a delight. You can paint your walls with the colours of onscreen action, or bathe in solid washes. If music is your bag, then the set will pulsate its LED lights with the beat, and gaming can make your room positively psychedelic.

Ambilight transforms this 43in set from just another smallscreen to a lifestyle lighting device. For a bedroom or den, the atmosphere that Ambilight creates is a huge bonus – and remember, it can be integrated into a Hue smart lighting system, which merely adds to the fun.

While adding bulbs, consider some external sound augmentation. The TV's audio performance is best described as adequate.

## Second-room selection?

In the world of budget UHD TVs, this Philips is a temptation. I would never advocate buying a 43in set as a primary 4K display, so if we take it as read that this is a second-room purchase, picture criticisms are mostly irrelevant. Far more important is the convenience of Freeview Play, key apps, and the general acceptability of its images. Throw Ambilight into the mix, and it only gains appeal ■

## HCC VERDICT



**Philips 43PUS6262**

→ £470 → [www.philips.co.uk](http://www.philips.co.uk)

**WE SAY:** This 4K screen doesn't skimp with connected services. HDR may be ineffective, but we're drawn to Ambilight like moths.



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LONG-TERM TEST

# Marantz AV8802A

**TIME ON TEST:** Two years **REVIEWER:** Richard Stevenson

**TWO YEARS AGO**, the 'A' suffix variant brought Marantz's flagship AV8802 processor bang up-to-date, allowing full-fat 11-channel Dolby Atmos processing and 4K passthrough via HDMI with HDCP 2.2 support. A later firmware update added DTS:X playback, and you could extend your 3D audio obsession to Auro3D if you were prepared to pay for the upgrade. It's still topping Marantz's AV range, so can the venerable AV8802A still claim its red-carpet status as we head into 2018?

## What's good about it?

Reviewing the AV8802A in HCC #253 ended in an inevitable, bank account-sapping conclusion. I had to buy one. Two years on and the Marantz is the heart of my home cinema system, delivering stunning AV performance on a weekly basis. It's still available, and its price ticket is also showing a modest drop from £3,350 to around £3,000.

Waving a fond farewell to the outgoing Denon AVP-A1HDA, the Marantz heralded in an era of true height channels at Stevenson Ranch. While Audyssey's excellent, if *faux*, DSX front-height processing is still doable on the AV8802A, the big draw here is genuine three-dimensional surround sound thanks to object-based audio processing.

The AV8802A saw the end of S-video connectivity, which isn't something anyone was going to complain about. I did, however, moan at the lack of a built-in Ethernet hub at the time (as Sony had just put a hub on its flagship

AVR) but that has proven far less of an issue in an era of ubiquitous Wi-Fi connectivity. Its twin antennas look the part, too, although its wired Ethernet connection has been my go-to connection.

Video-wise, this big beast supports 4K passthrough (including 50Hz/60Hz and 4:4:4 colour). Possibly more by luck than judgment, it happily passes through HDR10 as well (and Dolby Vision high dynamic range content will be supported by a firmware update in 2018). It can upscale 1080p content to 4K (although my source gear and display does that, too) and is certified by the Imaging Science Foundation with a full selection of optional ISFccc video calibration controls... which I have never used.

You wouldn't buy the AV8802A for its video tweaks; you buy it for its sound quality, which is sublime. This processor ekes out whole new layers of depth and articulation over my previous Denon and backs that up with plenty of clout. Few processors can match its ability to find detail within a soundtrack and fully unravel a complex multichannel mix. Not at its relatively affordable price, anyway.

Models from the likes of Anthem, Krell, Bryston and Datasat have all recreated a bigger, truer cinematic presence in my listening room and delivered just as much detail too. Yet their asking price is heading towards 'small family car' territory, so they were unlikely to take up residence here any longer than the review period. The Marantz simply delivers solid features and stunning sound at a very appealing price.

Two years of constant use hasn't diminished that impressive sound and the Marantz still rocks. It is

## AV INFO

**PRODUCT:**  
Atmos/DTS:X  
AV processor

**POSITION:**  
Marantz's flagship  
model

**PEERS:**  
Arcam AV860;  
Anthem MRX 1120



supremely neutral, with a sprightly and articulate balance. It's not quite the full-bore action-fest of some of its peers, but it is perhaps better suited to a much wider range of material. Play anything from stereo music to an Atmos-encoded Blu-ray thriller and it never disappoints or feels over-gunned.

With far more Atmos and DTS:X content to make the most of its outstanding processing abilities, the AV8802A is arguably more suited to today's home cinema environment than ever.

### What's not so good about it?

Well, are you a future-gazer worried about HDMI v2.1 – which will bring 8K video support, enhanced ARC skills and other goodies? Really, you probably shouldn't be, but there's nothing like an announcement from HDMI LLC to

**'Few processors can match its ability to find detail within a soundtrack and unravel a complex multichannel mix'**

upset the apple cart. The AV8802A is evidence of how HDMI specs can be upgraded, both physically and through firmware, but HDMI v2.1, I'm told by Marantz, won't be on any upgrade agenda. Food for thought.

A more immediate concern is that the Marantz's operational niggles still niggle. The supplied remote control is nothing to write glowing prose about, and not just because my now quinquagenarian eyesight struggles with its tiny legends and near unreadable LCD display. Its vertical symmetry makes for moments of hilarity, too – I have lost count of the times I have fervently pressed unresponsive buttons only to realise I'm holding it the wrong way around.

By comparison to the latest app-controlled home entertainment electronics, Marantz's 'Remote App' feels a little dated and clunky, too. It successfully replicates the main remote control but it doesn't add any further sophistication or panache. On a positive note, the backlight is brighter than the remote control, the buttons a whole lot bigger and you'll never use it upside down.

### SPECIFICATIONS

**DOLBY ATMOS:** Yes **DTS:X:** Yes **THX:** No **MULTICHANNEL INPUT:** Yes. 7.1-channel phono **MULTICHANNEL PRE-OUT:** Yes. 13.2-channel phono; 13.2-channel balanced XLR **MULTIROOM:** Yes. Zone 2 and 3 **AV INPUTS:** 4 x composite; 4 x digital audio (2 x optical and 2 x coaxial) **HDMI:** 8 x inputs; 3 x outputs **COMPONENT VIDEO:** 3 x inputs; 2 x outputs **VIDEO UPSCALING:** Yes. To 4K **DIMENSIONS:** 440(w) x 410(d) x 185(h)mm **WEIGHT:** 13.6kg

**FEATURES:** Audyssey MultEQ XT32 Pro; ISF video calibration; Apple OS and Android control apps; DLNA networking; Ethernet; Wi-Fi; Bluetooth; USB; AirPlay; FM and internet tuner; Spotify Connect; HDCP 2.2; 4K/60 passthrough; Pure Direct mode; Compressed Audio Enhancer; DSD, FLAC, WAV and ALAC hi-res audio support

My biggest niggle with the AV8802A, a factor of my admittedly unusual system of monoblock power amps and mix-and-match speakers, arises from the Audyssey XT32 room EQ, which aims to balance speakers at 75dB.

With my lineup, the setup procedure struggles to cope. To achieve that 75dB it applies a cut to all 'hot' channels; this results in a -12dB maximum cut to all channels in my system. The upshot is no channel balancing. My frisky centre speaker still comes in 5dB hotter than the rears.

To balance speaker levels, I've then had to go into the manual setup menu and adjust using an SPL meter, old-school style. Quite what this subsequent manual level adjustment does to Audyssey's Reference room EQ is a mystery but I can't help thinking it's less than ideal. Of course, most people will only set up once, but I'm forever swapping kit in and out of my system.

### Should I buy it?

The AV8802A is still top of Marantz's AV processor lineup, and still at the top of its game. There are even better-sounding processors out there – and with more customisable EQ systems – but they are all more expensive. I'm not looking to upgrade any time soon ■

**1. A pull-down flap reveals a secondary status window and additional inputs**

**2. The AV8802A has balanced XLR outputs for compatible power amplifiers**

### HCC VERDICT

★★★★★

#### Marantz AV8802A

→ £3,000 → [www.marantz.co.uk](http://www.marantz.co.uk)

**WE SAY:** Great value, cutting-edge AV processing with a natural and detailed sound – Marantz's AV8802A continues to impress two years after its launch.





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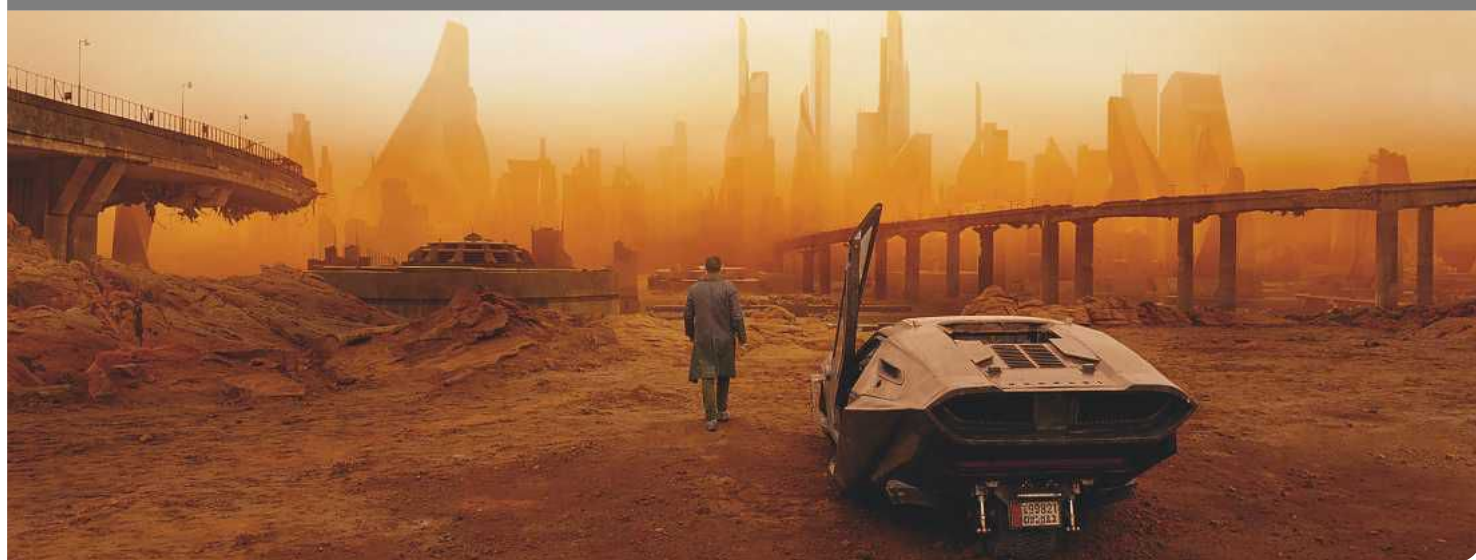
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# Digital Copy

With box office analysts adding running time to the *Blade Runner 2049* blame game, **Mark Craven** wonders if the intermission is due to make a comeback

**ONE OF THE** first things I want to do after watching a movie is watch another one. Some people binge-watch Netflix shows, I like to binge-watch Blu-rays. This means, however, that I have a preference for a certain type of movie. A short one.

Enjoying a home cinema double-bill, particularly midweek, is often a race against time. If you start your first flick at 7pm, but want to get to bed at a sensible hour, then it's obvious you can't pair *Lawrence of Arabia* with *Lord of the Rings*. Actually, you can't pair *Lawrence of Arabia* with anything.

Early next year, I'll sit down to watch *Blade Runner 2049* on BD. At 163 minutes (assuming there's no extended cut released for the domestic market), that won't leave any time for a second feature. Hopefully there'll be worthwhile extras to enjoy, or I'll have to switch off my AVR and go and do the washing up instead.

## Jackass 3D?!

This *Blade Runner* sequel, released in cinemas last month, has left critics in raptures but failed to ignite the box office as studio Warner Bros hoped. It hasn't flopped, as such, but is below par (actually ranking under the likes of *Jackass 3D* and *Scary Movie 3* in the list of highest-grossing opening weekends for October). I've subsequently read numerous pieces on why this is, although the reasons seemed fairly obvious – it's a follow-up to a 35-year-old movie that was itself not a box office-botherer, and marketed with trailers that seemed designed only to appeal to fans of the original.

One suggestion caught my eye, though. The length of the movie, 15 minutes shy of three hours, was apportioned some blame, because the longer a movie, the less screenings picture houses can cram in a day. Multiplexes are like me, apparently – they

like to binge-watch. Yet seeing as *Blade Runner 2049* is only around 20–30 minutes longer than the biggest movies of the last five years in the US (*Rogue One*, ... *Force Awakens*, *American Sniper*, ... *Catching Fire*, *Avengers Assemble*), and only two minutes longer than *Avatar*, I'm not sure I buy that argument. (And a 2014 study by data scientist Randal S. Olson has even proved that feature films, on average, haven't got any longer over the last 50 years – they just got shorter in the 1980s, and have now bounced back).

One thing that is for certain, though: **any movie approaching three hours long is going to give my bladder an interesting time**, particularly when seen at a cinema where they try to hawk you zeppelin-sized drinks as soon as you set foot inside the foyer.

Salvation here comes in the form of the Run Pee app, which tells you the opportune time in a film to sneak out to the toilet. I could have done with it when viewing *The Force Awakens*, as I left during what I thought was a natural lull in the story only to return and find [REDACTED] had been killed off.

I'm not for one moment suggesting that *Blade Runner 2049* director Denis Villeneuve should have been forced to take a scalpel to his apparent sci-fi masterpiece just to please people who grew up watching shorter films in the 1980s, or cinema-goers with weak bladders, or even cinema chains desperate to stack showings from dusk 'til dawn. Art is as long as the artist needs it to be.

An intermission might be an idea, though. In fact, that's yet another area where home cinema trumps going out to catch a movie. Press pause, grab another litre of fizzy pop – maybe even do the washing up... ■

*Should intermissions be brought back for long movies?  
Let us know: email [letters@homecinemachoice.com](mailto:letters@homecinemachoice.com)*

**Mark Craven**  
paused *Batman Vs Superman* so he  
could answer  
the phone and  
still hasn't  
resumed playback  
13 months later







# Film Fanatic

**Anton van Beek** approves of a column that ponders how involved filmmakers really are in the new Blu-ray restorations of their movies...

**THESE DAYS IT** can seem as if every Blu-ray restoration boasts of being approved by a filmmaker, but what does it actually mean? And how can we end up in a situation where a film like John Carpenter's *The Thing* can have two separate restorations in the course of two years, both approved by director of photography Dean Cundey, but with wildly different colour grading?

Obviously, I understand the value that comes from having filmmakers involved in the restoration process, and have spoken to industry professionals about that very topic in past issues of this magazine. But **there's still an obvious gap between a label saying that its new restoration has been approved by a filmmaker and our understanding of what that entails.**

Did they directly oversee the entire process, or just give a few pointers to the restoration team before signing off on the finished product? For the most part, it's impossible to know.

Shout! Factory says that its US Collector's Edition of *The Thing* has a 'new 2K scan of the interpositive supervised and approved by director of photography Dean Cundey.' Taking that wording literally, you could well infer that Cundey was only involved in approving the scan itself, not any of the work done to it subsequently. Information provided by Arrow in the booklet accompanying its new 4K restoration (see p102) is a little more useful, stating that 'director John Carpenter and director of photography Dean Cundey supervised and approved final grading...' but once again, it doesn't quite tell the whole story.

To find out how involved Carpenter and Cundey were in that release, you need to check out Head of Restoration James White's post on the Arrow Video blog (<http://arrowvideodeck.blogspot.co.uk/2017/10/some-notes-on-restoring-thing.html>), which goes

into far more detail. 'We sent them files to review during the initial grading and cleanup work,' says White. 'When it came time for their final grading session they spent several days reviewing every shot to make sure colour, contrast [and] highlights were all exactly as intended.' White also reveals Carpenter and Cundey had the luxury of tweaking the 2.35:1 framing assigned to every shot, if desired; a benefit of working from the unmasked negative. In an ideal world, every BD restoration boasting of filmmaker approval would be joined by exactly this sort of detail.

## Revisionist filmmakers

Another case in point among this month's software reviews is the Ultra HD Blu-ray release of *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, which has been touted, in press materials, as carrying a 'brand-new 4K restoration of the film supervised by director James Cameron.' While I'm happy to accept that he oversaw and signed off on the theatrical 3D conversion behind the release, it's hard to believe that he would have given a green light to the travesties that are the new 'flat' 4K and 1080p encodes.

And even when consumers know precisely what part a filmmaker has played in a restoration, it's still no guarantee of fidelity to the film's original visual aesthetic. Who can forget the revised colour-timing of the 2009 Blu-ray of *The French Connection*? While director William Friedkin tried to downplay his part in that mess in the furore that followed its release, he must have forgotten about the *Color Timing The French Connection* featurette that accompanied it, where he talks candidly about his thinking behind the deliberately revisionist appearance of the Blu-ray transfer ■

What are your worst examples of revisionist restorations? Let us know: email [letters@homecinemachoice.com](mailto:letters@homecinemachoice.com)

**Anton van Beek** won't be happy until he's seen the entire BD process from a negative being scanned to a price tag being stuck to a slipcase.





# In The Mix

**Jon Thompson** is overjoyed that some of Hollywood's heavy hitters are laying waste to the 'soap opera effect'. He just hopes that it will make AV manufacturers sit up and listen

**IN MY JOB** I spend months – if not years – working on the look of a film, keeping the director's vision and integrity from set to final screening. Unfortunately, when the film gets launched into the outside world, I can't come to everyone's house to make sure it maintains that integrity. I'm relying on some kind of standard to which your equipment will comply.

This, it seems, is wishful thinking, and not helped at all by TV manufacturers that seem to believe they know more than a film's whole creative team as to what it should look like. You know what I mean – picture modes that do nothing but mess up the feel of a movie.

It's long been a bugbear, and now other – more important – people are saying enough is enough. *Guardians of the Galaxy* director James Gunn (pictured above, right), *The Last Jedi*'s Rian Johnson, Edgar Wright (*Baby Driver*, *Hot Fuzz*), Chris McQuarrie (*Mission Impossible 5*, *Jack Reacher*) and Tom Cruise are, according to Gunn on Twitter, all onboard 'the anti-motion smoothing campaign.'

Motion-smoothing can be great for watching sports but has no place when viewing a feature film. What has got Gunn and chums all wound up is that, out of the box, all TVs seem to come with these visual-emotion-killing features turned on. Which totally undoes everyone's work on the film, including mine.

As Rian Johnson argued on Twitter, to a suggestion that people can just turn motion smoothing off, a TV's menu settings can be difficult to navigate for an AV-newbie. 'MENU>PICTURE>ADVANCED CONTROLS>REALITY AUGMENTATION>MOTION LIQUIDITY>FLUID FRAME RESTORATION,' suggested Johnson, isn't an easy thing to get one's head around. 'If you want movies to look like liquid diarrhoea, fine,' added the director. 'But it should be a choice you

make, not a hoop everyone has to jump through to unmake.'

Why are TV menus so incomprehensible? I know of people who have connected an Ultra HD Blu-ray player to a 4K HDR TV, tried to play an HDR disc, and had an error message. I'm not sure how many TVs have been returned to a shop due to this, only to find out that several menus deep you had to activate HDR for the HDMI input you were using. So we have **TV brands hiding the switch to turn on a major selling feature**, but allowing the 'soap opera effect' to be on by default. Changing that is going to be an uphill battle.

## Motion sickness

These motion-smoothing engines don't do a good job – for a start, the TV doesn't have enough processing power to even attempt a good job. But TV manufacturers seem lost in adding features that are actually detrimental to picture quality.

I'm happy the likes of James Gunn are standing up and trying to start a process of education. This was the original intent of THX, before it lost its way.

Only through filmmakers and manufacturers working together will this happen, though. On the TV side, Panasonic deserves applause for its work with the Hollywood community, although you'll still find its Intelligent Frame Creation on by default on many of its picture modes. On the audio side, the likes of Arcam are pushing for cinematic accuracy. So some hope is coming down the pipe – but it needs a few more of us (including you!) to stand up and say this is not how it's supposed to be, and demand all the effort is recognised that has gone into making the films you love ■

*Do you regularly use your TV's motion-smoothing processing? Let us know: email [letters@homecinemachoice.com](mailto:letters@homecinemachoice.com)*

When he's not in his screening room, **Jon Thompson** tweets about Hollywood gossip, movie-making and digital mastering at [@johnnyfocal](https://twitter.com/johnnyfocal)





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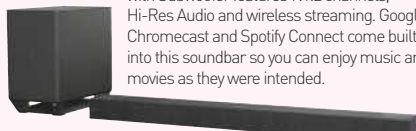
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# Feedback

Got an axe to grind? Need to comment on current tech? Want to share your knowledge with our readers? **Team HCC** is here to help

## Picture this...

In the letter headed '6.1 to Dolby Atmos help!' [*Feedback*, HCC #277] you say: 'In the case of Denon's AVR-X6300H (pictured below), the manual advises...'. The problem being the unit pictured was the Denon AVR-X4300H and not AVR-X6300H.

Not the sort of mistake we expect from a quality mag such as yourselves.

Been a subscriber for some years now and still eagerly look forward to my copy of this excellent magazine even month. Keep up the good work.

Vic Parratt

**Mark Craven replies:** Sorry Vic. Can we say in our defence that the backs of AVRs all tend to look the same after a while? No, of course we can't. So here's a pic of the X6300H, which – while looking quite similar (both offer 11-channel speaker terminals, and 11-channel pre-outs) – is an AVR with actually 11 channels of amplification.

## Disc rental rules!

Just as I read Mark Craven's column about the closure of Lovefilm [*Digital Copy*,



Denon's eleven-channel AVR-X6300H – we promise

*HCC #277*], I got an email from Amazon stating why.

Yes, I am very disappointed by this, as I've found the service to be excellent and unique. It was my first port of call for new films. Hiring at first, then buying it on Blu-ray or UHD Blu-ray if it was that good. If it wasn't that good, it saved me money!

I stopped going to the cinema as I detest people using mobile phones while you're trying to enjoy the film. Hiring solved that, as I can sit in the comfort of my own home and relax to watch the feature.

I could stream but I don't feel you get the same quality in sound or picture as you do from disc.

## Superfluous Blu-rays

Do you have any idea why if I buy a UHD Blu-ray disc I also have to take a totally superfluous standard Blu-ray disc?

I cannot come up with an acceptable answer except the obvious one, and that is that the disc companies can charge more for the package.

I have written to Universal, Sony, Warner Bros and 20th Century Fox about this situation but have not received a reply from them after more than a month.

Roger Wheeler

**Anton van Beek replies:** This is somewhat maddening. But I'd say studios feel they have to charge a premium for 4K over Blu-ray (as it's a premium format), and slipping in a BD disc, without its own case, is a cost-effective way of softening the blow of that higher price. Who would prefer a single 4K disc at the same price? And some releases are better with that Full HD BD – think extras, 3D, etc.



*Dredd* 4K comes with a Full HD disc featuring the film's 3D encode, plus original extras



Oh, and thank you for your pointing me to CinemaParadiso to continue my film rental.  
Kenneth Packard

## Disc rental rules! Part II

Hi. I was disappointed to read of the demise of Lovefilm. I have subscribed since 2010, paying only £4 a month to rent two films from Lovefilm's vast catalogue.

The service has always been first-rate and the occasional problem with the playing of a disc has always been speedily rectified.

Many of the films I have rented were recommended in your *Playback* section, including more obscure titles that don't appear on Amazon Prime or Netflix.

Disc space at home is dwindling and Lovefilm was part of the answer. It also worked out a lot cheaper than buying, although sometimes a film was so good that I would buy it, too.

I know streaming is more convenient, but the choice is not as good and the picture quality on Blu-ray is better, even on my eight-year-old Panasonic plasma.

Thanks Lovefilm.  
Hugh Saich

## Disc rental rules! Part III

As someone who has been with Lovefilm since before Blockbuster closed down, I was extremely disappointed with the decision by Amazon to shut its rental service. I feel Amazon had an obligation to its customers beyond pure profits to keep it running.

Remember: it did take over Lovefilm, which I have no doubt would still be running if Amazon hadn't bought it out.

Amazon's primary reason is that streaming has taken over. But I would like to know where are the 3D films and the UHD films to stream in the UK?

I think the real reason is it believes by denying choice it can increase its sales of DVDs/Blu-rays.

You only have to look at the tactic it uses around Christmas when few films are given a rental release until after the festive period, so people will buy its stock instead.

It has, of course, offered a bog-standard Amazon Fire stick at a reduced price (it should have at least had the decency to give these away) but if you wish for a higher-quality solution you need to buy the Amazon Fire box at a normal price.

So we're left with CinemaParadiso as the only company in the UK to rent from. I've found this to be a fine company but with far less stock than Amazon, so you can wait months for a disc at the top of your list before receiving a copy. Maybe we should all drop our Amazon Prime membership, which is the only thing Amazon seems interested in, until it changes its mind.

Michael Niblett

## ★ Star Letter...

### Ranting and raving about 3D

**This is less of a question and more of an open letter to AV manufacturers who seem to be doing all in their power to hasten the demise of my beloved 3D. Cease and desist. Please.**

I once read somewhere that 3D was a buying consideration of only around 15 per cent of [TV] purchasers, and the reason the industry giants have stopped producing 3D-capable sets. That is still around 1 in 6 that will never again be able to enjoy 3D in the home when their current equipment eventually fails.

I am annoyed that the very same industry that pushed domestic 3D (I was a late convert to be fair) is actively trying to kill it off. It is unsettling to see 4K Ultra HD Blu-ray players omitting 3D playback. It can't be much more than a few lines of code and a small modification to a PCB, surely?

The biggest worry, however, is seeing some of the newest 4K PJs being introduced without 3D functionality. Seriously? Projectors are the ideal fit for 3D as you won't get a bigger image in most domestic settings than a PJ and a screen. I have a theory about why 3D in the home did not take off as expected – most people only experienced it on small screens. 40in (or smaller) 3D television? No offence, but really? Why did they even bother producing 3D displays at those sizes? You would have to sit with your face pressed against the screen to get the truly immersive effect that this format can offer.

I am in that minority who still want 3D for my home cinema. There is absolutely nothing quite as effective as a 3D film, played through my projector and 7.1.2 speaker setup, to wash away the memory of the weeks' trials and tribulations. As long as Hollywood continues to produce 3D blockbusters I want to be able to enjoy them at home, in all their extra-dimensional glory, for many years to come. Although I stream the odd bit of 4K content to the TV in the lounge, and I won't deny it looks pretty impressive, I am not going to buy into the 4K format for the bigscreen at the expense of 3D.

That is why I implore the AV industry to continue to support this format. It may not be the driving force for most television buyers, but there are many of us that will gladly pay a premium to be able to enjoy 3D now and well into the future.

I doubt that most people choose a restaurant based solely on whether they



serve vegetarian dishes, but you would be hard-pressed to find an eatery these days that doesn't offer a decent selection of meat-free options, and even fewer drivers smoke in a car anymore but most manufacturers still provide an ashtray for those who do. Not the greatest examples, but you get my drift.

Even half that 1 in 6 figure, say 1 in 12, is a lot of potential buyers to marginalise. I would love to see some budget manufacturer decide it wants this forgotten percentile and lure people away from the 'Big Boys' by supplying affordable, largescreen, 3D-capable 4K TVs/UHD players/4K projectors. That's the potential for an 8 per cent market share, with no immediate competition. Just a thought.

Rant over. Thanks for listening.  
L Britton

**Mark Craven replies:** A great rant, L – you've obviously put some thought into it. That 15 per cent figure sounds dated, though – I can't imagine modern buying statistics being anywhere as close.

Sony is continuing to sell 4K 3D projectors, but not at mass-market price points. It's most affordable model, the recently launched VPL-VW260ES, retails for around £5,200. DLP competitors, while selling Full HD 3D models, currently only offer 4K 2D PJs – presumably because TI's chippiness doesn't allow it. I imagine if someone *could* sell a 4K/3D PJ for under £2,000, they would.

So stick with your Full HD 3D PJ and 7.1.2 setup and enjoy it. 4K isn't going away, and the solution to your problem (adding a huge secondary 4K HDR TV to your system) is only going to get more affordable in the long run.

Star letter-writer L Britton grabs a copy of car crime caper *Baby Driver* on Blu-ray. Written and directed by Edgar Wright, this music-infused high-octane thrill-ride stars Ansel Elgort as a young getaway driver who cruises the streets to the beat of his own playlist. *Baby Driver* is out now on digital and races onto 4K Ultra HD, Blu-ray and DVD on November 13, courtesy of Sony Pictures Home Entertainment.

**Mark Craven replies:** Thanks Michael, Kenneth and Hugh for your views on the Lovefilm closure. I'm glad my column spurred you to write in, yet obviously not so glad that you are all going to have to live without your Lovefilm fix.

Amazon's £15-off-a-Fire-TV-Stick offer is generous (the company didn't really have to do anything) but I'm certain it won't be what Lovefilm subscribers were hoping for. As I wrote in my column, the appeal of Lovefilm is so much more than movies-on-demand: it's about the audio-visual quality on offer, the relaxed user experience and the lack of any additional technology needed beyond player and TV.

## 4K BD doesn't do it for me!

I remember going from Laserdisc (which I loved) to DVD and being blown away with the many special features that the format could hold, and the very good picture quality.

Then when I bought my first HD Ready LG 50in plasma and one of Sony's first Blu-ray players I was completely gobsmacked with the HD image. What a huge leap in picture quality! The first Blu-ray title I bought was *Casino Royale*, and the many outdoor scenes left me totally speechless.

And now I have one of Sony's early 4K TVs which doesn't have HDR, but I have always been impressed with the natural look of the picture quality. What am I missing with Ultra HD Blu-ray discs? Yes there is a slight improvement to the picture, but I am not blown away as I was going from DVD to Blu-ray. I have watched a movie on my daughter's Sony 4K TV, which does have HDR, but I can't see any difference from her TV to mine – not to justify rushing out and replacing my beloved Sony. It's just not that big of a leap in picture quality, not for the extra money that you have to pay for an Ultra HD Blu-ray.

Lastly, I loved 3D. My Sony 4K TV has the passive 3D format and, yes, the image is sometimes not perfect, but the added depth to the visuals makes me enjoy the format. I blame the active 3D format for killing off 3D – people complained about getting headaches while watching a 3D movie, something that with passive you don't get. Plus the glasses are cheap, so I was never scared when the grandchildren came round and wanted to watch a 3D Disney movie.

I for one will be sorry to see 3D go. I can't understand why 3D Blu-rays are still being released. Surely it would be better to end the format now?

I have around 50 3D Blu-rays and have no idea what I will watch them on when my current TV needs replacing. Hopefully by then 8K will be out, then maybe I'll get blown away again.

Paul, Plymouth



*Casino Royale* on Blu-ray left HCC reader Paul 'totally speechless'

**John Archer replies:** The first thing to say is that we're missing quite a bit of information that could help spot where your issues may lie – for instance, specific TV and 4K Blu-ray models, plus 4K BD titles you've tried. (Although I'm guessing you've got a Sony 55X9005A TV?).

It is true, though, that the step up from HD to 4K is not as extreme as the step up from SD to HD. 4K also benefits from a big screen, and can be impacted by secondary picture issues such as LCD motion clarity and source compression/shooting resolution. However, I and many others love 4K. Done well it comfortably outperforms HD, even on relatively small TVs – not just in terms of detail, but also image depth and colour resolution. Ultra-sharp 4K Blu-rays include *Transformers: The Last Knight*, *Sully* and *Billy Lynn's Long Half-time Walk*.

Much as I like 4K, though, the real revolution is high dynamic range. This looks so transformative when expertly implemented that I question whether you really saw HDR on your daughter's TV (getting HDR working can be complicated), or if the title used was a bit of a poor effort. Also, if a TV doesn't have enough brightness, colour range and contrast to do it properly, HDR can fall flat, or even look worse than SDR.

*Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* on 4K Blu-ray looks jaw-dropping. Give that a spin, or *Planet Earth II* or *The Revenant*, and I swear you should experience a sense of wonder at least equal to the one you had when you first saw *Casino Royale* on Blu-ray.

## OLED or LCD + saved money?

I'm looking to buy a 60-65in TV for under £3,000. Any recommendations? Is OLED really worth an extra £1,000ish? My current TV is a 42in Panasonic plasma, and my most regular sources are Netflix and Amazon.

James

**Mark Craven replies:** OLED, the tech that LG, Sony and Panasonic are pushing these days, but Samsung isn't, would be a good fit for you if you've been using (and enjoying) your Panasonic plasma for a while, which I assume you have been. The two technologies share a 'naturalistic' vibe – but OLED definitely lacks the brightness impact (and subsequent colour punch) of a good LED-lit LCD.

Of course, if you want 65in (you won't find any 60in OLEDs) that only really leaves you with LG's B7 under £3,000. That's a fine TV, though – see HCC #277 for our review of the 55in version.

You'll find more affordable options at 65in (and 58in) with LED LCDs. There's a lot of choice, too, but some are more successful than others, with LED backlight issues being a particular trait with HDR content. Of course, opt for something like Sony's KD-65XE8596 and you'll find yourself saving over a grand. Do that, and you could add a decent surround sound setup to your shopping cart, if you don't already have one.

A couple of things – when you get your new TV, make sure you upgrade your Netflix subscription to 4K so you can get the most out of it. And if you have any budget left over, definitely consider a 4K Blu-ray player.

## Short but to the point

Hi. Regarding universal remotes [AV Avenger, HCC #277], I have used two of these. They are good for switching multiple devices on or off – and not much else.

Brian ■

## Contact us...

Write to HCC, AV Tech Media Ltd, Suite 25, Eden House, Enterprise Way, Edenbridge, Kent, TN8 6HF, or email us at [letters@homecinemachoice.com](mailto:letters@homecinemachoice.com)

Please note: we cannot guarantee to print/answer all the letters we receive. Sorry.



## WIN! Great Blu-rays up for grabs...

Just email your answer to [Competitions@homecinemachoice.com](mailto:Competitions@homecinemachoice.com) to be in with a chance to win

### Cult of Chucky

The latest sequel in the legendary horror franchise is out now on Blu-ray and DVD, courtesy of Universal Pictures, and to celebrate we have a very special prize to give away. One lucky winner will receive a *Cult of Chucky* Blu-ray, plus a copy of the script signed by writer/director Don Mancini and stars Fiona Dourif and Jennifer Tilly! In addition, four runners-up will receive the *Cult of Chucky* Blu-ray.

#### Question:

Which famous 'Brad' voices Chucky?

#### Answer:

- A) Brad Dourif B) Brad Friedel  
C) Brad Pitt

Email your answer with '*Cult of Chucky*' as the subject heading – and don't forget to include your postal address!



### War for the Planet of the Apes

Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment brings the climactic chapter in the acclaimed science-fiction saga to 4K Ultra HD Blu-ray, 3D Blu-ray, Blu-ray and DVD on November 27. To mark the release we have five Blu-rays up for grabs!

#### Question:

Who plays the role of Caesar in the new series of films?

#### Answer:

- A) Roddy McDowall B) Andy Serkis  
C) Bubbles the chimpanzee

Email your answer with '*War for the Planet of the Apes*' as the subject heading – and don't forget to include your postal address!



### Your Name

This animated Japanese blockbuster about two teens who somehow swap bodies (and genders) makes the leap to DVD, Blu-ray and Collector's Edition

Steelbook on November 6. Thanks to Anime Limited we have five Blu-rays to give away. Simply answer the following correctly to be in with a chance of winning one...

#### Question:

Which noted anime filmmaker wrote and directed *Your Name*?

#### Answer:

- A) Hayao Miyazaki B) Makoto Shinkai  
C) Katsuhiro Otomo

Email your answer with '*Your Name*' as the subject heading – and don't forget to include your postal address!



### Preacher: Season 2

Get ready for one hell of a wild ride as the latest season of the brilliantly demented comic book adaptation *Preacher* makes its Blu-ray and DVD debut

on November 13, courtesy of Sony Pictures Home Entertainment. To celebrate, we have three copies of the *Preacher: Season Two* Blu-ray to give away!

#### Question:

English actor Dominic Cooper plays which role in the *Preacher* TV series?

#### Answer:

- A) Jesse Custer B) The Saint of Killers  
C) Herr Star

Email your answer with '*Preacher: Season 2*' as the subject heading – and don't forget to include your postal address!

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8. Comp winners' info available on request.
9. The closing date is December 7, 2017.

# Certified: AV-Holic!

HCC reader **Gavin** returns to our pages with a revamped cinema system to show off. There are hardware upgrades aplenty, plus a new found love of Dolby Atmos...



## Welcome to the AV-Holics Hall of Fame – again. Introduce yourself!

I'm Gavin Clayton, aged 33, and I work as a uPVC service engineer.

## What's in your AV setup?

I have two screens – a Samsung 55in HU8500 4K curved TV, and a 120in motorised projector screen for my Optoma HD50. Sources are a Sky Q 2TB PVR; Panasonic DMP-BD60 Blu-ray deck; and a Popcorn Hour A500 media player, upgraded from my previous Xstreamer Prodigy.

I've also upgraded my AVR from a seven-channel Onkyo TX-NR717 to a nine-channel Denon AVR-X4300H, now joined by a Rotel RMB-1512 12-channel power amp. My B&W speaker setup has been overhauled, too, with

new CM10 S2s for front left/right, 686 S1s for surround and rears and four CCM362 in-ceiling speakers. The KEF subwoofer and B&W centre speaker remain the same.

## You've moved house and got a new cinema room – did space for your setup factor into the house you bought?

That definitely was high up on my list. I wanted to make sure the room would be able to function as a living room for the family, as well as being the right shape and size for a home cinema install.

## You've now got an Atmos system. What's your verdict?

It definitely makes a big difference over the 5.1 setup I had before, completely changing the atmosphere of a movie. I feel the extra depth

the height layer provides makes you feel like you are in a sound bubble, drawing you deeper into the film.

## What was the last thing you added to your setup?

The new B&W CM10 speakers.

## Are you thinking of upgrading anything else?

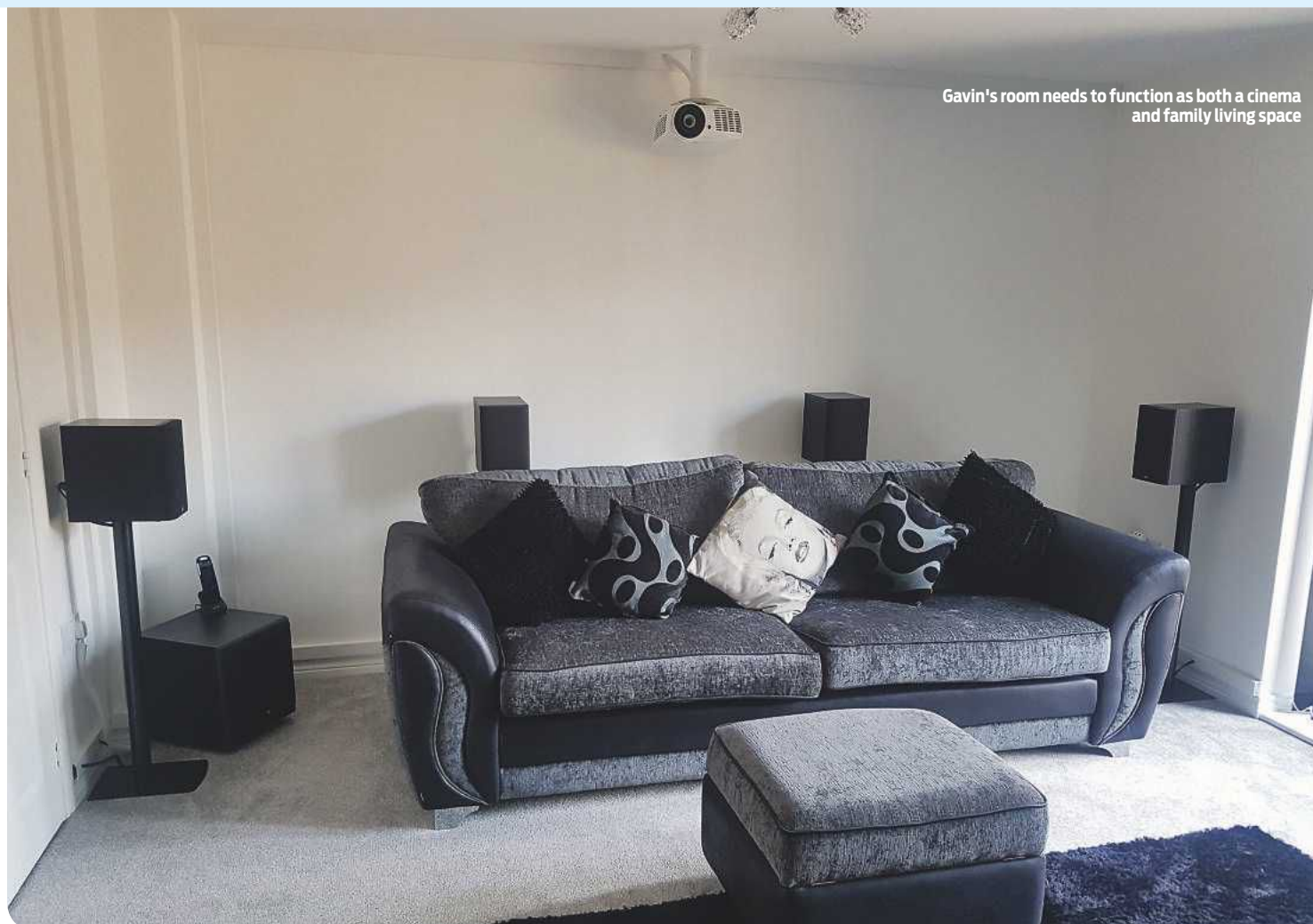
I have had my KEF sub for a few years now. That would be next on the list to change. I've been eyeing up the SVS PB16-Ultra as a replacement, if I can find somewhere to fit it!

## Why did you decide to change your B&W fronts/surrounds?

I'd had the 603 fronts and 602 rears for a while. When changing the rears I decided to get an extra set to bump it up to 7.1.



Gavin's room needs to function as both a cinema and family living space



The KEF subwoofer could soon be replaced by a larger SVS PB16-Ultra

The CM10s were not a planned purchase – I listened to a demo in store and fell in love with them instantly. The sound between them and my 603s at the time was on a completely different level. They're definitely one of my best upgrades.

**Two years ago [HCC #251] you said you were waiting for 4K Blu-ray to arrive – will you be getting a 4K BD deck soon?**

I keep contemplating it. There are still quite a few Blu-rays being released with Atmos soundtracks at the minute. The remastered *Terminator 2* 3D/4K release may sway me to make the jump, though [or it may not, see page 96 – Ed].

**Was it easy to run speaker wire, plus cabling for the Samsung TV and projector, in-wall?**

The property we brought is a new build so chasing cables was made easier by most of the house using stud walls. It was, however, tricky at times fishing for them, especially the ceiling Atmos speakers. The lower-down parts that I couldn't do I had to cleverly disguise using cable trunking.

**We like the bias lighting behind the TV – how did you achieve this?**

I picked up a three-metre LED kit online, and ran its power cabling at the same time ➤



Four in-ceiling height speakers complete this Atmos array

I wired the TV up. The LED strips had an adhesive backing and were easy to attach. The remote has a colour wheel so we use it as mood-lighting in the evenings.

## What's your favourite bit of kit, and why?

That's always a hard one to decide. At the minute the B&W CM10s are still wowing me so I'd have to say those, followed closely by the Rotel RMB-1512 – it's a very well-built power house.

## What movies/discs do you use to show off your system?

I managed to get hold of a Dolby Atmos demo disc so I have been using that a lot. The battle scene in *Hacksaw Ridge* is a great system workout as well.

## And what are your Top 5 favourite flicks?

*Predator* (my local cinema is having a screening for its 30th anniversary in November so I'm really looking forward to going to that); *Terminator 2*; *RoboCop*; *Rise of the Foot Solider*; and *It* (2017 remake).

## Do you stream movies/TV from Netflix/Amazon/Sky etc?

Sky Q's excellent for on-demand – we use that daily. We also have a Netflix 4K subscription.

## How often do you settle down for movie night?

Wednesday is dedicated movie night every week. Most weekends are, too, at the minute.

## What do friends/family think of the cinema?

Both my daughters are movie-lovers as well so it's been a great hit with them. My partner Joanne loves it as long I am not buying something new every five minutes.

We have friends over a lot for big sporting events. The projector makes it big enough for everyone to get a front row seat! ■



Gavin says the B&W CM10s are on 'a completely different level' to his previous speakers



The Denon AVR (right) is a new addition, but the Optoma PJ was brought over from the former setup



## Share your cinema system in the mag!

If you want to be in **HCC**, you'll need to send us some hi-res images of your cinema room. Here are a few tips...

1. Go big. Set your camera to take images at the largest possible size, and at the highest resolution. Don't worry about cropping or resizing – we will make them print-ready.
2. Get in focus. Make sure your photos are as sharp and clear as possible. If you have one, use a tripod, or place your camera on a flat, steady surface and take pictures on a delay. The sharper they are, the bigger we can print them.
3. Let some light in. While we tend to watch

- movies in the dark, our cinema systems look their best when they are lit. If you can shoot with natural daylight, do so. If your room doesn't get a lot of light (a garage conversion, for instance) then switch on whatever lights are fitted. Avoid using flash wherever possible.
4. Be thorough. Send photos of as much of the room as possible. Images of both the front and back of the room, the kit rack, speakers, seating, disc shelf, movie poster art... The more the merrier.

5. Don't be shy. Send a picture of yourself!
6. Show us more. Got pictures of your room before it was a cinema? Or snaps of work being done? We love to see these, too.

### Now what?

Email your images to **letters@homecinemachoice.com** with the subject heading 'AV-Holic', and provide your answers to the relevant questions above – then we'll be in touch!





# SERIE T/i



T/7i (left) shows proprietary Arrow™ zero compression wireless connector upper corner.  
T/9i (right) features new Fiberallay™ ultra-fast driver.

## Reimagined, Then Reengineered

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# PLAYBACK

→ **SOFTWARE HIGHLIGHTS** **TERMINATOR 2** It's judgment day for the 4K reissue of Cameron's sci-fi actioner **BABY DRIVER** Petrolhead heist caper races into your home cinema **YOUR NAME** Anime blockbuster works its magic in hi-def **THE THING** John Carpenter's horror masterpiece reborn on Blu-ray **CULT OF CHUCKY** He's your friend to the end... & MORE!



## More than meets the eye?

Transformers: The Last Knight → Paramount → Ultra HD Blu-ray

Paramount leaps into the world of Dolby Vision HDR technology with the Ultra HD Blu-ray release of its latest *Transformers* sequel. Turn the page to find out why the result is a treat for 4K videophiles...

HCC RATINGS KEY...	
Outstanding	★★★★★
Above average	★★★★☆
Acceptable	★★★☆☆
Disappointing	★★☆☆☆
Dire	★☆☆☆☆

All prices quoted are approximate and may have changed



'Call me Octopus Slime again – I dare you!'



4K  
ULTRA  
HD

# Battling 'bots with real Vision

This bloated blockbuster shows signs of franchise fatigue, but dazzles with its AV presentation



## → TRANSFORMERS: THE LAST KNIGHT

The latest and fifth instalment in the long-running *Transformers* franchise re-imagines the Arthurian legend with giant robots, opens with a medieval battle sequence and heads rapidly downhill from there. It's 2 hours and 27 minutes long with what feels like 2 hours 25 minutes of relentless action. There might have been a plot, but it gets entirely lost in the unremitting battles, hackneyed characters and puddle-shallow dialogue.

The movie doesn't even have the good grace to not take itself too seriously, as ultra-hero Optimus Prime switches between good guy, bad guy and good guy again. If you're a fan of the franchise and about eight years old it may tick some boxes. Otherwise it is a relentless stream of staggeringly spectacular visual and audio effects... so, not all bad then.

**Picture:** Whether you watch the HDR10 or Dolby Vision 4K encodes, or 1080p iteration, your peepers are in for a treat.

While all are apparently based upon a 2K DI, there's exquisite detail here, no doubt a benefit of beyond-4K source photography. And ...*The Last Knight* really dazzles in other areas. Viewed in DV, colours are stunning, contrast expansive and the image depth goes back into the screen for miles. The range of tones and detailed lighting levels

is staggering – this is highlighted by the emerging ship, sea-scape and vanilla sky in Chapter 17, where the scene switches to the cornucopia of greys inside the ship and back outside again just to drive the visual spectacle home.

**Audio:** There's Atmos audio on both the 4K and Full HD discs and the result is as classy as home cinema gets. Largescale dynamic effects and crisply articulate dialogue are all spot on, while use of the overhead layer is remarkably subtle, engaging for the swelling score, atmospheric effects that are genuinely meant to be above the action – check out 'Bee's voice as he towers over a prone TRF operative at the end of Chapter 3.

It's a supremely impressive and complex mix all round, and not as mindlessly OTT as you might think.

**Extras:** The bonus BD platter is packed with extras. *Merging Mythologies* does a better job of explaining the plot than the movie and *Climbing the Ranks*

shows how the film's military look quite so believable in action. (Spoiler alert: they're real soldiers). There are also location featurettes and VFX analysis. A highlight is a sequence on how they brought production to the UK, and a brief cut to a terrified Anthony Hopkins in the passenger seat of a McLaren hurtling through London. 'How are you going to do Arthur and Merlin without going to England?' asks the director rhetorically.

We honestly enjoyed the extras more than the movie.

## HCC VERDICT

### *Transformers: The Last Knight*

→ Paramount → Ultra HD BD & All-region BD → £40

**WE SAY:** Incredible visuals and Atmos sound turn this shallow sequel into a home cinema hero.

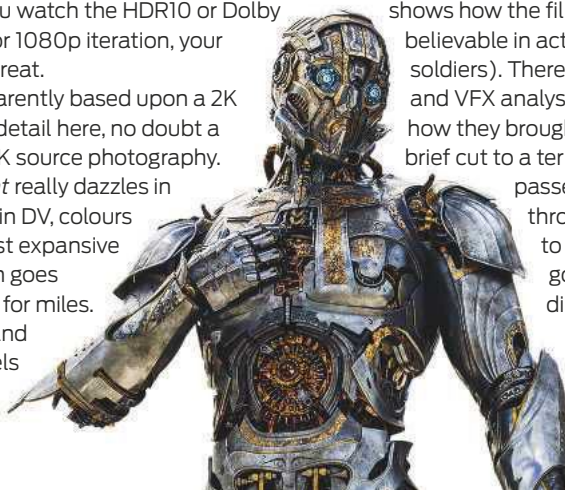
Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

**OVERALL:** ★★★★★





## The Beguiled

Universal Pictures → All-region BD  
£25



Sofia Coppola gives the hysterical 1971 Clint Eastwood gothic thriller an art-house makeover, shifting the focus from

the injured Union soldier to the female staff and students at the Southern school that takes him in. While this may seem like a small matter, it alters the entire tone of the story, making for a far subtler and more comically macabre film whose third-act twists hit that much harder. While this BD won't be anybody's next demo disc, the gauzy 1.66:1 Full HD encode captures Coppola's stylish visuals, and the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix is pleasingly atmospheric. Two short featurettes are also included.



## It Comes at Night

Universal Pictures → All-region BD  
£25



Not all great films have to be strikingly original. Sometimes it's enough to simply take a familiar setup and do it again,

albeit really, really well. Such is the case with Trey Edward Schultz's masterful psychological thriller *It Comes at Night*, which takes the familiar idea of a small group of people in a single location struggling to trust one another and uses it as the basis for a meditation on guilt and grief. Shot digitally, the film's low-lit cinematography makes a smooth transition to BD, as does the understated 5.1 sound design. Extras take the form of a half-hour *Making of...* and a chat-track.



## Despicable Me 3

Universal Pictures → All-region BD  
£25



This recent animated outing for Gru and his extended family employs that tired soap opera trick of a previously unknown twin brother to try and pep up a series that is clearly

running out of steam. Unfortunately, it's not enough to stop *Despicable Me 3* from feeling like it's going through the motions, content to coast on a tide of slapstick silliness rather than do anything fresh with the formula. Little kids the film is aimed at probably won't care, and this Blu-ray's colourful 2.40:1 1080p encode is impeccable. The DTS:X mix creates a convincing 360-degree soundscape, too.



# Fall in love with anime again

Makoto Shinkai's visually arresting romantic blockbuster lives up to the hype

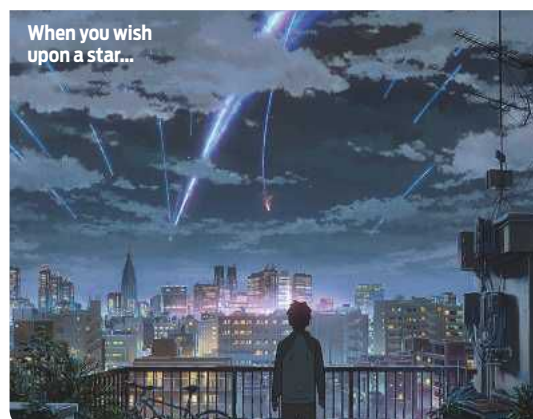
## → YOUR NAME

'Please make me a handsome Tokyo boy in my next life!' cries country girl Mitsuha, frustrated at her rural village existence. Clearly, nobody ever told her to be careful what you wish for, as Mitsuha wakes up one morning to find herself occupying the body of city boy Taki. Similarly, for reasons he can't fathom, Taki finds himself occupying Mitsuha's body.

This animated body-swap romance became the fourth-highest grossing film of all time in Japan when it was released last year, surpassing even the legendary *Spirited Away*. And while it may sound like little more than a *Freaky Friday* rerun, the thrillingly beautiful *Your Name* is a far more imaginative and creative piece of work, mixing its high-concept setup with sci-fi and disaster movie tropes to create something unique.

Along the way the film's tone shifts from farce to survival drama, but always does so at the service of the bittersweet romance that blossoms between Mitsuha and Taki. As with writer-director Makoto Shinkai's previous animations (*Voices of a Distant Star*, *The Garden of Words*, etc), for all of its fantasy trappings, *Your Name* is an exploration of the way people in love attempt to overcome the distances between them. The result is a human story that feels more real than most live-action films.

**Picture:** *Your Name* arrives on Blu-ray with an immaculate 1.78:1-framed 1080p encode. Despite a stylistic fondness for bold light sources that often bleach out areas at the top of the frame, the overall impression you take away is one of crisp delineation and fulsome colours. This hammers home the



beauty of the film's animation, a seamless melding of traditional line art techniques and computer-generated backdrops.

**Audio:** The Blu-ray offers up a choice of three DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtracks: the original Japanese language track, an English language track with Japanese songs left intact on the score, and an English track with English-language songs. The basic elements of the three tracks are very good, delivering a well organised soundfield that really brings the locations to life, while the events of Chapter 10 prove that it's also able to whip up dynamic surround effects and powerful bass when necessary.

**Extras:** The main extra feature is a 22-minute Japanese TV special featuring Makoto Shinkai and voice artists Ryunosuke Kamiki and Mone Kamishiraishi. This is backed up by various promo spots and a filmography for Shinkai, with trailers for each of his films.



## HCC VERDICT

### Your Name

→ Anime Limited → Region B BD  
→ £25

**WE SAY:** A stunning presentation of a beautiful fantasy romance – but more extras would have been nice.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★☆☆☆

**OVERALL:** ★★★★★

# I know now why you cry...

James Cameron's hit sequel debuts in 4K HDR on a disc that will leave some fans scratching their heads



## → **TERMINATOR 2: JUDGMENT DAY**

It's safe to say 1991's *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* caused a stir when it landed in cinemas, flaunting a massive budget and groundbreaking CGI. The resulting audience stampede saw it challenge box office records, cement James Cameron's status as Hollywood royalty and have it crowned by some as that rarest of things – a sequel superior to its forebear.

T2 isn't that, though – it lacks the sheer unpolished energy and lean storytelling of Cameron's *The Terminator*. But it certainly succeeds in being bigger, both in its narrative scope and action sequences.



The motorcycle's backfires were getting out of hand



## Is it time to bid 'hasta la vista' to 3D conversions?

While James Cameron is still too busy making his various *Avatar* sequels to approve Blu-rays of *The Abyss* and *True Lies*, he has found the time to oversee a stereoscopic conversion of *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*.

As with the 3D presentations of Cameron's *Avatar* and *Titanic* before it, T2 3D is more concerned with giving the imagery a sense of depth than poking the viewer in the eye. And the conversion proves extremely adept in this regard, with set-pieces such as the rubble-strewn 'Future War' (Chapter 1) and the helicopter chase (Chapter 10) creating convincing layers of action. Characters and objects within the frame also have a tangible volumetric mass.



That's not to say there are no 'out-of-the-screen' effects. T2 contains its fair share of shots where people point guns directly at the camera (including the one shown above – Chapter 3) that now provide precisely that sort of stereoscopic impact.

The real proof of the conversion's quality, though, comes from the smaller touches. A prime example is a wisp of smoke that convincingly hangs in air, caught in the beam from the cop's torch as he examines the cut fence following the T1000's arrival (Chapter 2).

Another bonus is that the drop in clarity caused by 3D glasses means the digital processing that hinders the 'flat' presentations is less objectionable here.

Is the 3D version of T2 an essential watch? Not at all. But as stereoscopic conversions go, it's definitely one of the better efforts and, given how the format's fortunes have faded, could prove to be the last high-profile 3D retcon we'll ever see.

*Terminator 2... 3D* is available as a standalone BD and as part of the 'Endo Arm' limited edition boxset.



The movie's real genius lies not in its fluid SFX (although they're impressive), but in its repurposing of its original cast. Sarah Connor (Linda Hamilton) is here transformed from poodle-haired sidekick to muscular action heroine, while Arnold Schwarzenegger's switch from baddie to hero is inspired, creating a father figure to dad-less John Connor (Edward Furlong), and a handy weapon to fight the seemingly indestructible T1000.

Two-and-a-half decades since its release, *T2* hasn't lost its ability to thrill. The plot still intrigues, the occasional gags still raise a smile and the T1000 still terrifies. At the same time, the fact that it softened its edges to get a '15' rating irks, and James Cameron's direction can at times feel oddly passive, despite the destruction happening onscreen.

**Picture:** Studiocanal's Ultra HD Blu-ray release (as evidenced by a pre-movie line of text) is apparently based upon the new Digital Intermediate struck for its theatrical 3D release earlier this year. And perhaps this explains why the movie doesn't look as enticing in 4K as many fans will hope.

The issue is that grain reduction and digital smoothing has obviously been applied – presumably to enable a more effective 3D presentation – and that, while the 3,840 x 2,160 image appears pleasingly sharp, it's almost superficially so. There are strong edges, but other areas of the picture appear almost CG like in their lack of really fine detail. It's particularly evident in the scene where Schwarzenegger enters the biker bar in Chapter 1, stark naked. His skin appears ultra-smooth, his hair and eyebrows waxy, and the image feels flat.

Previous BD releases for *T2* have also suffered from digital cleanup work, so maybe this isn't unexpected, but anyone hoping for a 4K iteration of how this 35mm production will surely have looked in cinemas in 1991 will be disappointed.

HDR grading is subtle, rather than spectacular. Comparisons with the 1080p platter show little overt difference in how bright highlights (often, in this movie, glinting chrome) are handled. More obvious is the switch to a cooler colour palette on the Ultra HD



Linda Hamilton will return in a new *Terminator* film in 2019

version, which is clearly noticeable in skin tones – Schwarzenegger, Furlong and Hamilton have less of a pinkish hue – and less warmth in the movie's daylight Los Angeles scenes.

This 2.40:1 encode does have its merits. There's a clear uptick in sharpness over the Full HD version, black levels are strong and there's a pleasing sense of contrast. But, overall, this is a disappointing UHD HDR debut for Cameron's much-loved actioner.

Just before going to press, Lionsgate announced a delay to the Ultra HD BD of *T2* in the US. At the time of writing, this Studiocanal UK release was still scheduled for November 13.

**Audio:** For its sonic accompaniment, *T2* on 4K carries a DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix (the previous Skynet Edition Blu-ray offered DTS-HD MA 6.1, an earlier outing offered lossy Dolby Digital), and, while not being the Atmos or DTS:X upgrade that some may have craved, it's a solid track, particularly considering the movie's vintage.

There's a skilful balance between Foley effects, Brad Fiedel's lumbering score and dialogue, with a strong LCR spread and effective use of the surrounds. The truck/bike chase sequence (Chapter 3) sounds weighty and large – Arnie's shotgun packs a meaty punch, while screeching metal and rasping engines cut through with clarity.

Note that the German audio is DTS-HD MA 7.1. So if you're bilingual, maybe this is the one for you.

**Extras:** All extras can be found on the 1080p disc – all you get on the 4K platter are mind-bendingly slow animated menus that delay your enjoyment of the movie. Of the extras, the one that'll most interest *T2*-hedz is the new 55-min *Reprogramming The Terminator* doc, which looks back on the film's conception, production and impact. Packed with talking heads (including Schwarzenegger and Cameron), it's candid in a way that a documentary made 26 years after the fact can be.

The other new bonus bit is a trailer for the 2017 theatrical 3D release. Archival extras are: a *Making of...* doc from 1993 (4:3 aspect ratio); two deleted scenes (with optional commentary); trailers; and two archival commentary tracks accessible from the setup menu.

The Full HD disc also packs three cuts of the film (Theatrical, Special Edition and Extended Special Edition), via seamless branching.



The film scooped the 1992 Academy Award for Best Visual Effects



*T2* was the highest-grossing film globally of 1991



## HCC VERDICT

### *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*

→ Studiocanal → Ultra HD BD & Region B BD → £30

**WE SAY:** *T2*'s super-smooth 4K encode erases its celluloid origins from history.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

**OVERALL:** ★★★★★

## Arcade Action

Bigscreen home entertainment isn't just about movies anymore. **Rik Henderson** checks out a videogame vying for time on your home cinema system...



### FIFA 18

EA Sports → PS4, Xbox One, PS3, Xbox 360, Nintendo Switch and Windows PC → £55

Gaming is rarely unpredictable these days; sequels reign supreme and there's one title that, regardless of quality, is a bestseller annually. *FIFA* games have had their ups and downs in the last 24 years, but you know it'll be at the top of the Xmas charts or thereabouts.

Thankfully, this latest instalment marks a great year for the franchise. Not only have the in-house developers at EA Sports had extra time with the Frostbite graphical engine, first used in *FIFA 17* last year, but there are enough changes under the hood to make this outing a better game all-round.

It is still unmistakably *FIFA*, with an over-emphasis on attacking flair in comparison with defending, but it plays like a football sim should. There's just enough of a nod to real-life tactics and play, all the while retaining the fast-paced arcade feel that puts it on a par with *Pro Evolution Soccer*.

As well as graphical fidelity to the real players, the animation engine has been heavily reworked. Previous *FIFA* games have been criticised for unresponsiveness due to players needing to complete set animations before changing direction. This time the game animates frame by frame, resulting in less lag and smoother action.

This is combined with a greater number of different animations based on player body type and skill, which makes for a welcome variety in running styles, movement and overall feel. It doesn't make much of a difference to play, but it ensures the game look amazing.

And that's the main impact of *FIFA 18* – it's visually spectacular. Crowd animations are superior to before, stadium renders are spot-on, and the lighting engine has been overhauled to make different regions in the game look like the TV presentations of their real world counterparts. In South America, for example, the lighting is overblown, with less contrast, while in Europe it looks more peaky.

All of this is presented in dynamic 4K and HDR on PS4 Pro (and will be on Xbox One X).

One word of warning for Switch owners is that *FIFA 18* for the Nintendo console is a very different beast. It lacks *The Journey* – *FIFA*'s story mode – and some of the finer tweaks to the career mode. It's also built on an entirely different, less glossy graphics engine. That said, it plays a more than decent game of *FIFA* for a portable console and will keep commuters happy.



## The Howling

Studiocanal → Region B BD  
£23



Often viewed as the lesser of 1981's two werewolf flicks (the other being *An American Werewolf in London*), director Joe Dante's *The Howling* is a smart, sleazy and enjoyably

playful addition to the genre that serves up all the thrills and spills fright fans could hope for. While this long-awaited UK BD serves up an impressive 1.85:1 1080p restoration (with a choice of LPCM 2.0 and DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio), it ranks a distant second to Shout! Factory's 2013 Region A US release when it comes to bonus goodies (the chat-track is especially snooze-worthy).



## Star Wars: Rebels – Complete Season Three

Walt Disney → All-region BD  
£23



The penultimate season of this superb CG cartoon digs deep into fan service territory with guest appearances from a host of familiar characters from the films and other spin-offs

as it explores the formation of the Rebel Alliance and the established lore and mythology of the sci-fi saga. Splitting its 22 episodes across three BD-50 platters, this HD release delivers impressive 1.78:1 encodes backed up by five chat-tracks, five *Making of...* featurettes and 19 episode-specific *Rebel Recon* behind-the-scenes vignettes. It's just a shame that Disney keeps saddling the show with lossy DD5.1 sonics.



## The Crown: Season One

Sony Pictures → All-region BD  
£45



Based on this initial 10-episode season, this exquisitely written and beautifully acted series chronicling the reign of Queen Elizabeth II may well end up being one of the crowning

achievements of Netflix's move into original drama. While it's a shame that there's no Ultra HD Blu-ray release on the cards (*The Crown* is available in 4K to stream from Netflix), this four-disc 1080p release acquits itself very well with richly detailed 2.00:1 imagery and atmospheric DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio. The sole extra is a gallery of 99 stills and behind-the-scenes photos.







# Boy racer hits the right notes

Edgar Wright's fast, fun crime caper delivers a cinematic symphony of high-octane action

## → **BABY DRIVER**

This crime thriller hit cinemas earlier this year like a force of nature. Writer-director Edgar Wright's combination of ultra-slick action, rocking indie soundtrack, cult characters, music-based editing and memorable dialogue came out of nowhere to persuade us that, mercifully, there are still people in Hollywood willing to take a big-budget chance on a strong script and original idea. Kudos, too, to A-listers Jamie Foxx, Kevin Spacey and Jon Hamm for recognising this tale of a reluctant but talented getaway driver as worthy of their participation.

**Picture:** *Baby Driver* enjoys a good rather than great 4K transfer. Detailing typically only looks marginally higher than it does on the HD Blu-ray, perhaps as a result of the 4K disc being essentially an upscale of an original 2K cinema master.

There is an enhanced sense of depth to the film's many street shots, but this seems more a function of the 4K version's high dynamic range and wider colour gamut than any really significant extra resolution.

The 4K disc's HDR and WCG talents also make the film's daylight exteriors look more eye-catchingly bright and give much more vibrancy and gleaming metallic presence to the cars that play such a big role in the film.

Skin tones sometimes look forced, however, and some night-time scenes appear with elevated

black levels and exaggerated noise, although this may just be HDR exposing *Baby Driver*'s apparent use of an unusually wide range of cameras.

**Audio:** Music is so intrinsically woven into *Baby Driver*'s tone and editing that it's a relief to find the film benefitting from a sometimes stupendous Dolby Atmos soundtrack. All of the movie's many songs erupt around your speakers with power and dynamic impact, working your subwoofer into the ground and pumping aggressively into every Atmos channel.

Our only complaint would be that the mix can be a bit all or nothing, sounding as subdued and empty during the 'talky bits' as it is gloriously full-bore during action sequences.

**Extras:** *Baby Driver*'s main features are two chat-tracks: one by Wright alone, and one by Wright with cinematographer Bill Pope. Wright is certainly charming, but tends to dwell too long on single trains of thought. His joint effort with Pope is better, as he has to rein himself in to accommodate the input of someone who he clearly has a lot of respect for.

On top of this there are also 11 worthwhile deleted and extended scenes; six behind-the-scenes featurettes covering everything from stunt driving training to the way that the use of music shaped the movie and how it was shot; animatics; rehearsal and audition footage; the complete storyboards for the entire film; music videos; and countless promo videos. Phew... >



Wright choreographed cast movements to the beat of the film's music



## HCC VERDICT

### *Baby Driver*

→ Sony Pictures → Ultra HD BD & All-region BD → £30

**WE SAY:** Not a demo-grade 4K HDR transfer, but it still justifies its extra cost over the Full HD Blu-ray.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

**OVERALL:** ★★★★★





# The Dynamation dynamo

Indicator's second Ray Harryhausen boxset is another must-own for fans

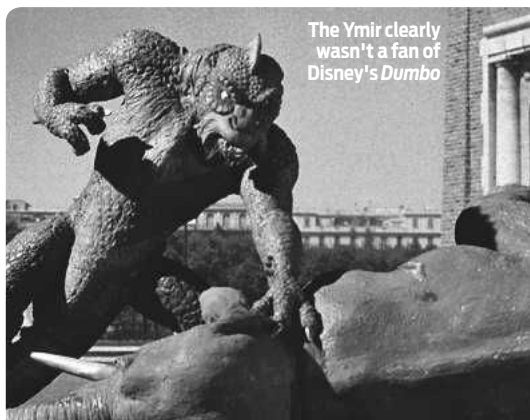
## → THE WONDERFUL WORLDS OF RAY HARRYHAUSEN – VOLUME ONE: 1955-1960

Enjoyably silly creature-feature *It Came from Beneath the Sea* (1955) kicks off this three-film boxset in fine style with its story of a giant radioactive octopus attacking San Francisco. While the human characters are as dull as you'd expect, Harryhausen's beast is an absolute triumph – even if it does only have six tentacles because the budget wouldn't stretch to animating eight of them.

The monster mayhem continues when a crashed spaceship brings a deadly Venusian creature to our world in *20 Million Miles to Earth* (1957). While the scenes of the rapidly growing Ymir terrorising Rome and fighting an elephant would make this a winner by any measure, it's the fact that Harryhausen is able to imbue his monster with so much personality that elevates the film to another level.

Like most adaptations of Swift's satirical novel, *The 3 Worlds of Gulliver* (1960) dispenses with large chunks of the book, but still makes for a rollicking Sunday afternoon action-adventure. Also, while it didn't offer up any fantastical beasts for him to sink his teeth into, Harryhausen still got to animate an alligator for the diminutive Gulliver to battle.

**Picture:** As with Sony's 2008 standalone releases, *It Came from Beneath the Sea* and *20 Million Miles to Earth* give you the option of watching the original black-and-white versions or colourised presentations. Picture quality is generally very good (with the usual caveats about 'baked-in' dirt on the many optical effects), although the Harryhausen-approved colour



The Ymir clearly wasn't a fan of Disney's *Dumbo*

versions are really little more than curios. Best of the bunch, however, is the gorgeous 1.66:1 presentation of *The 3 Worlds of Gulliver*, which is based on a 4K restoration of the original camera negative.

**Audio:** All three films sport LPCM versions of their original mono soundtracks, while *It Came from Beneath the Sea* and *20 Million Miles to Earth* also get DTS-HD MA 5.1 do-overs. Naturally, the former are the way to go for purists, but the remixes aren't entirely without merit and add some additional potency to the scenes of destruction.

**Extras:** Each of the three Blu-rays is jam-packed with goodies including commentaries, trailers, stills galleries, featurettes and interviews (including brand-new chats with director Joe Dante, special effects legend Dennis Muren and Aardman Animation's Peter Lord, David Sproston and Dave Alex Riddet). The set also includes an exclusive 80-page book containing new essays about the films.



### HCC VERDICT

#### The Wonderful Worlds of Ray Harryhausen – Volume One: 1955-1960

→ Indicator → All-region BD & R2 DVD → £43

**WE SAY:** Impressive presentations of three Harryhausen classics backed up by a wonderful array of extras

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

## Tag

Eureka → Region B BD & R2 DVD  
£18

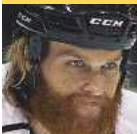


One of the three films by idiosyncratic director Sion Sono released into Japanese cinemas in 2015, *Tag* kicks off in truly audacious style as a high-school girl survives a lethal gust of wind that slices through a bus, cutting down all of her classmates. What follows is a relentless series of chases through different setups in different bodies (don't worry, it makes sense... sort of... eventually). This brilliantly bonkers flick lands on Blu-ray with a sharp and colourful 1.85:1-framed 1080p encode, although the LPCM 2.0 soundtrack feels a touch underpowered for such dynamic material. A trailer is the only extra.



## Goon: Last of the Enforcers

Vertigo Releasing → R2 DVD  
£16



With its mix of sporting drama and violence, ice hockey has proven fertile ground for films – and while 2011's *Goon* was no *Slap Shot*, it was a likeable effort that hid some real heart amongst its broken bones and vulgar laughs. This belated sequel – which finds an injured Doug 'The Thug' Glatt (Sean William Scott) confronting life outside the sport – continues in much the same vein. Skipping Blu-ray in the UK, Vertigo's DVD delivers a modest 2.40:1 transfer and oddly flat DD5.1 sonics. Extras include almost two hours of interviews.



## Carnival of Souls

The Criterion Collection → Region B BD  
£28



Shot on a shoestring budget with a cast largely made up of non-actors, this spooky 1962 flick should be a complete mess. But somehow the strange alchemy of Herk Harvey's stark direction, stilted acting and hypnotic score work together to create a disorientating and dream-like experience unlike anything outside the films of David Lynch. The centrepiece of this exceptional Blu-ray package is a magnificent 4K restoration partnered with a potent LPCM mono soundtrack. Fascinating extras include a chat-track, a video essay and a collection of Harvey's industrial shorts.



## Murder on the Orient Express

Studiocanal → Region B BD  
£23



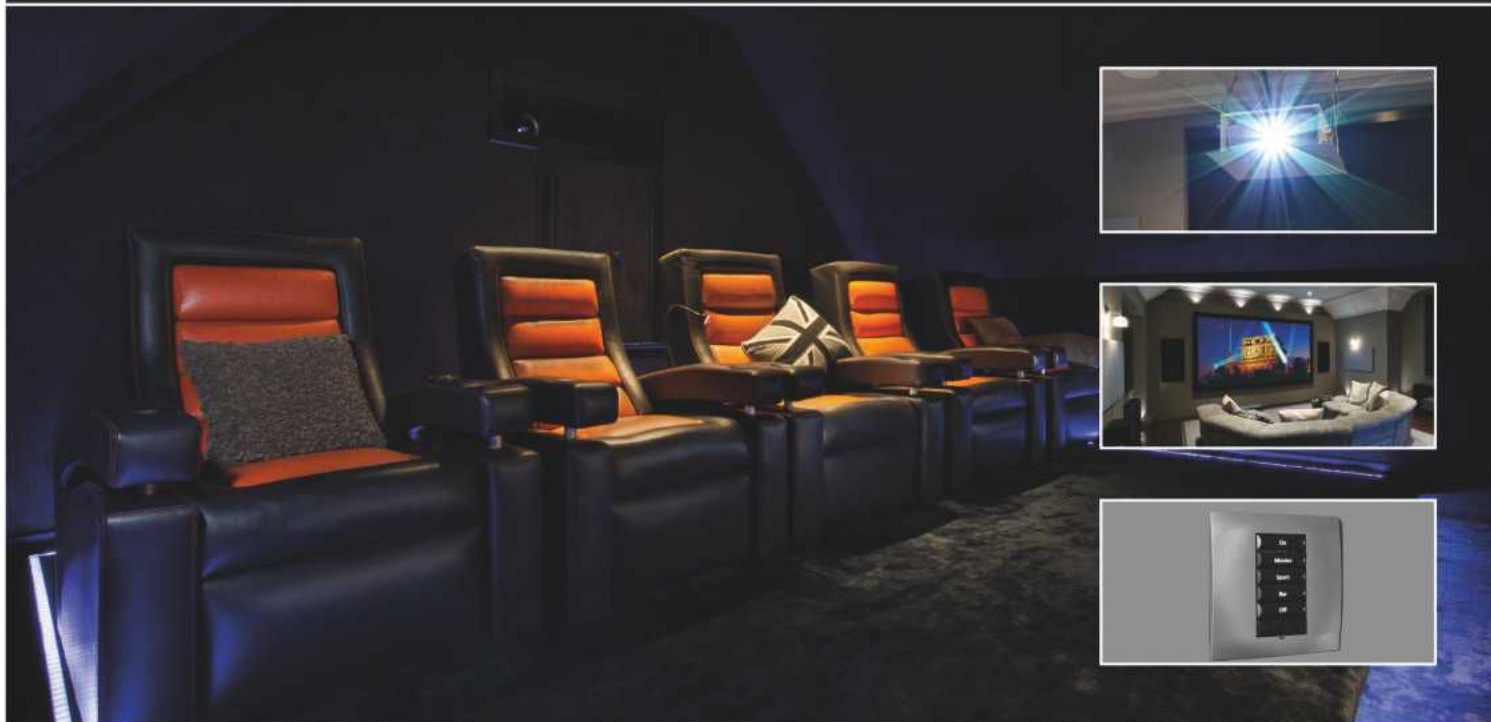
An all-star cast trying out an outrageous mix of accents is just one of the joys to be found in Sidney Lumet's 1974 bigscreen adaptation of Agatha Christie's best-known whodunnit. An unfussy piece of filmmaking, the movie simply lets the cast get on with things and fills the screen with glitzy period trappings – which is no bad thing at all. The rather gauzy cinematography is given sympathetic treatment by the 4K restoration that was the basis for this Blu-ray release. Extras include a four-part *Making of...* and a new interview with producer Richard Goodwin.





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MacReady could only gaze in awe at the camp's giant beer cooler...



DISC  
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# Arrow does the right Thing

Exclusive 4K restoration gives John Carpenter's classic horror the disc it always deserved

## → THE THING

The Summer of 1982 saw the release of two films that flopped at cinemas, but which have since gone on to be seen as classics of their respective genres. One was Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* and the other was this, John Carpenter's horrifying remake of *The Thing from Another World* (1951).

But whereas Scott's film was simply ignored by audiences, Carpenter's was also despised by critics, who found the grisly, yet ground-breaking, special effects too much to stomach. These days, however, both critics and audiences are able to look beyond the (still incredibly powerful) effects and see Carpenter's film for what it really is – a masterfully written and directed study of distrust and paranoia, brought to life by a terrific ensemble cast that never puts a foot wrong.

All that remains to be seen is whether this latest home media release is a must-own for the movie's die-hard fans...

**Picture:** Believe it or not, this is the third different Blu-ray presentation of *The Thing*.

First up was the 2008 Universal Pictures disc, which was basically a port of its earlier HD DVD, but afflicted with even more noise reduction and edge enhancement. That was followed, last year, by US cult label Shout Factory's *Collector's Edition*. This Region A-locked reissue boasted improved picture quality, courtesy of a 2K scan of 35mm interpositive elements that was approved by the film's director of photography Dean Cundey.



## HCC VERDICT

### The Thing

→ Arrow Video → Region B BD  
→ £25

**WE SAY:** A stunning 4K restoration backed up by dynamic 4.1 sonics and an exhaustive array of extras.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

**OVERALL:** ★★★★★

Now Arrow has entered the fray with its own restoration, using a 4K scan of the original 35mm camera negatives, with the grading and cleanup work reviewed and signed off by John Carpenter and Dean Cundey. While the Shout Factory encode looked quite good in isolation (although there were concerns about colour timing), direct comparisons with Arrow's 2.35:1 encode highlight how much the image was digitally sharpened to try and pull more detail out of the source material. By contrast, Arrow's restoration retains a far less harsh, more film-like appearance throughout, albeit one that still packs the screen with plenty of finery. Differences in contrast and grading also swing in Arrow's favour.

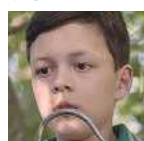
**Audio:** This restoration features a choice of three soundtracks – LPCM 2.0 stereo, DTS-HD MA 4.1 and DTS-HD MA 5.1. Based on the original 70mm six-track Dolby Stereo soundtrack, the 4.1 mix is the real highlight here, creating a surprisingly wide L/C/R spread supported by a potent low-end and fun rear-channel effects.

**Extras:** To support its restoration, Arrow provides a bunch of new extras, some more interesting than others. The best of these are a 78-min doc looking at the original short story and the 1951 film as well as Carpenter's remake, plus a commentary from a trio of genre experts. Slightly less essential are a look at other films from the Summer of 1982, a short tribute film and pieces dedicated to *Thing* fans. The disc also includes the best of the archival extras, including the superb *Terror Takes Shape* doc and John Carpenter/Kurt Russell commentary.



## Channel Zero: Season One – Candle Cove

Second Sight → Region B BD  
£20



There's more than a hint of Stephen King about this six-part story that links a series of

child murders in a small US town to a children's TV show. Based on the 'creepypasta' (a type of online horror meme) of the same name, ...*Candle Cove* is a refreshing alternative to *American Horror Story* and if they can maintain the same quality, bodes very well for future seasons of *Channel Zero* (which will adapt other creepypasta). This quality Blu-ray release splits its six pristine 1.78:1 Full HD encodes over two discs and includes a chat with series creator Nick Antosca.



## Torso

Shameless → All-region BD  
£16



Another issue of *HCC*, another Sergio Martino *giallo* Blu-ray release courtesy of cult UK label Shameless. This time

there's no sign of Edwige Fenech, instead *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*'s Suzy Kendall stars in a 1973 tale of a killer who gets his kicks strangling female college students. Not Martino's best, but gory fun all the same. While Shameless' 1.66:1 encode is uncut and features English onscreen text inserts for the first time, this stylish proto-slasher still struggles with the same scanner noise issues that plagued the previous overseas Blu-ray releases. Shame.



## Willard/Ben: Limited Edition Boxset

Second Sight → Region B BD  
£35



What's better than one killer rat film? Two of them! Second Sight's Blu-ray boxset brings together the 1971 cult classic *Willard* and its disappointing 1972 sequel *Ben* (best known

for giving us the Michael Jackson song of the same name). While the former film receives a lovely restoration based on a 4K scan of the original camera negative, the latter looks considerably rougher, being based on an archival print that is the best surviving element. Fun extras include commentaries and interviews with actors Bruce Davison (*Willard*) and Lee Montgomery (*Ben*), plus assorted promo spots.



# Making fun sequels is child's play

After seven instalments this iconic fright-flick franchise still feels unusually fresh

## → CULT OF CHUCKY

After four years of incarceration in an asylum for the criminally insane, wheelchair-bound Nica (Fiona Dourif) has finally accepted that she murdered her family and Chucky was nothing more than a symbol of her psychosis. But when her doctor brings in an old Good Guy doll to aid with her therapy, it isn't long before the killing starts again.

Meanwhile, original *Child's Play* survivor Andy Barclay (Alex Vincent) is in possession of the doll's severed, but still alive, head. But Chucky can't be in two places at the same time, can he? So what the heck is really going on?

With seven films now under its belt, it would be easy to dismiss the *Child's Play* series as just another slasher franchise in the same vein as *Friday the 13th* or *Halloween*. However, it's to Universal's credit that it has allowed series creator Don Mancini to keep taking the franchise in interesting and unexpected directions (even if they don't always pay off fully – yes, we're looking at you, *Seed of Chucky*).

Where does that leave *Cult of Chucky*? Well, in pulling together characters and stories from across the entire series, while escalating things to a whole new level, it's nothing less than the *Fast Five* of killer doll movies. And we loved every absurd minute of it.

**Picture:** Shot digitally, *Cult of Chucky* slices its way onto Blu-ray with a crisp 1.78:1-framed 1080p AVC encode that makes the most of the film's stark white interiors. Primary tones have plenty of 'pop' to them thanks to rich colour saturation, and even if detailing isn't the sharpest you'll ever see, there are plenty of

That deadly doll is no dummy



fine textures on show. Apart from some minor banding, there are no other obvious digital anomalies to be seen.

**Audio:** The film's DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix is a spacious affair that makes atmospheric use of the surrounds throughout, before really stepping up in the final act. Bass has real presence when needed. Dialogue and music are cleanly rendered and well balanced in the mix.

**Extras:** Unlike the US Blu-ray release, this UK platter only features the uncut version of the film (but why would anyone want to watch the alternate, censored, cut anyway?). However, we do still get all of the great extras, including a chat-track, three deleted scenes and two *Making of...* featurettes. There's also a charming short video by Kyra Gardner (daughter of head puppeteer Tony Gardner) talking to key members of the cast and crew about how the franchise has turned into a family affair.



## HCC VERDICT

### Cult of Chucky

→ Universal Pictures → All-region BD  
→ £16

**WE SAY:** It may not offer much for newcomers, but *Cult of Chucky* is a blast for franchise fans.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

**OVERALL:** ★★★★★

HDR adds an extra level of 'zing' to the film's UFOs



# Encounters of the 4K kind

Spielberg's mesmerising sci-fi celebrates its anniversary in style with this UHD remaster

## → CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND: 40TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

Steven Spielberg followed up 1975's *Jaws* two years later with this superior sci-fi drama that centres around a fine performance from *Jaws* alumnus Richard Dreyfuss and some memorable VFX.

Like *E.T. the Extra Terrestrial* (see opposite), this has Spielberg in benign (kinda) alien territory, yet *Close Encounters...* is an altogether more mysterious and mature flick. The script delights in gradually revealing the concept at its heart – that aliens have been abducting humans from around the world for years, and now fancy saying 'hello.'

If it's been a long time since you watched it, you may only have clear recollections of specific scenes and moments – Roy (Dreyfuss) making towers from mashed potato; a kid's toys coming to life; the five-note calling signal of the alien UFO. What's great about reacquainting yourself – perhaps for the first time since its 2007 BD release – is that the entire film doesn't really miss a beat, weaving between stories and characters before arriving at its satisfying, open-ended finale.

**Picture:** Slapped backs all around for Sony Pictures for delivering a UHD presentation (2.40:1) that allows *Close Encounters...* to shine through with all its filmic glory intact. Certainly, any celluloid production that opens with a sandstorm is going to have nowhere to hide its inherent grain structure, but once you're over the initial shock that you're not watching something



That's one heck of a security light...

### HCC VERDICT

**Close Encounters of the Third Kind: 40th Anniversary Ed.**

→ Sony Pictures → Ultra HD BD & All-region BD → £30

**WE SAY:** The extras have been abducted, but Spielberg's masterpiece impresses in 4K.

**Movie:** ★★★★★

**Picture:** ★★★★★

**Audio:** ★★★★★

**Extras:** ★★★★★

**OVERALL:** ★★★★★

as slickly smooth as *Passengers*, this image's strengths come to the fore.

Detail levels enjoy a healthy boost over previous incarnations, resulting in a firmer image. Going hand in hand with this is the widened dynamic range, which improves contrast and sense of three-dimensionality. At the far end of the spectrum, HDR highlights are sympathetic to the source, but add a level of zing. Lovely stuff.

**Audio:** The soundtrack is the DTS-HD MA 5.1 track created for the 30th Anniversary Edition Blu-ray. This remains a strong effort, particularly when it comes to LFE presence during the film's extra-terrestrial set-pieces and clarity of dialogue in a movie where there's often plenty of chatter going on.

**Extras:** In this two-disc set, both the 4K and Full HD feature film discs allow viewing of Theatrical, Director's Cut and Special Edition versions, with a *View From Above* mode that highlights differences between them with graphic icons. And that's your lot.

Want extras? A £60 limited edition set (featuring a musical, light-up box) includes a second 1080p platter containing a 22-minute *Three Kinds of Close Encounters* doc (with *Arrival* director Denis Villeneuve one of the talking heads); a five-minute collection of on-set 'home movies' Spielberg shot during the film's production; and storyboard-to-screen comparisons. These are all new – also present is the 101-minute *Making of...* doc, deleted scenes, *Watch the Skies* featurette and more from the previous BD. Annoyingly, in the US the standard 4K release has all three discs.



## Blood Simple

Studiocanal → Region B BD  
£23



Presumably based on the same 4K restoration that Criterion used for its US release last year, this UK Blu-ray outing for Joel and Ethan Coen's feature debut is certainly a joy to behold. Although the opening credits look fairly soft, the 1.85:1 1080p encode quickly settles down and fills the screen with rich colours and refined textures. A choice of LPCM stereo and DTS-HD MA 5.1 mixes is offered, with the latter's use of the surrounds sounding a little forced at times. Extras include new interviews with the Coen brothers, Frances McDormand, John Getz and M. Emmett Walsh, plus a proof-of-concept trailer.



## Body Heat: Premium Collection

Warner Bros → All-region BD & R2 DVD  
£15



Lawrence Kasdan's sizzling 1981 neo-noir stars Kathleen Turner (in her first bigscreen role) as an alluring *femme fatale* who seduces a sleazy lawyer (William Hurt) and manipulates him into killing her wealthy husband. This steamy thriller has a deliberately diffuse aesthetic that has a knock-on effect on the amount of fine detail present in the Blu-ray's VC-1 1.78:1 encode, although native film grain is present throughout. The TrueHD 5.1 mix is understandably focused on dialogue rather than dynamic effects. A three-part *Making of...* heads up the archival extras.



## Point Blank: Premium Collection

Warner Bros → All-region BD & R2 DVD  
£15



The best of the many films based on Donald E. Westlake's Parker novels, director John Boorman's hard-boiled 1967 revenge thriller sees a swaggering Lee Marvin acting like a force of nature as he sets out to recover the \$93,000 he believes he's owed by a crime syndicate. Originally released in the US in 2014, this Blu-ray stills pleases. In addition to an excellent 2.40:1 1080p encode supported by brisk DTS-HD MA mono audio, the disc serves up two vintage featurettes and a fascinating commentary featuring Boorman and Steven Soderbergh.



## Belle de jour: 50th Anniversary Edition

Studiocanal → Region B BD  
£23



Director Luis Buñuel's surreal and sexy 1967 classic stars Catherine Deneuve as a bored housewife who finds an outlet for her masochistic fantasies when she offers her services to a high-class brothel. Sadly any initial excitement over the film's new 4K restoration is brought crashing down to Earth by some less than optimal Blu-ray encoding that gives the movie an overly harsh, digitally processed look. Previous bonus bits (including a commentary and TV doc) are joined by an hour-long Q&A and a 15-min chat with the film's co-writer.



# Glowing with HDR goodness?

You'll want to phone home to tell everyone how good *E.T.* looks on 4K Blu-ray

## → E.T. THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL

Say 'Spielbergian' and *E.T.* is the film that probably pops into most people's heads. On the surface, it's a simple tale of boy meets alien, boy and alien become friends, boy loses alien, but like all good flicks there's more here than mere story, from the wonderful puppet design and John Williams's spine-tingling score to the script's understanding of its childhood characters and Spielberg's deft direction. It treads a fine line between involving drama and syrupy sentimentality, though.

**Picture:** Universal's UHD BD remaster of *E.T.* isn't a jaw-dropping blaze of 4K, high dynamic range glory. The word to have in mind when approaching *E.T.*'s new 4K HDR clothes is 'sensitive'. Rather than pushing the film's naturalistic photography and settings into extreme realms, HDR and wide colour enhancements are used gently and respectfully.

Interiors in Elliott's home feature more luminous artificial light sources than you get on the HD Blu-ray, as well as palpably richer colours in things like the Art Deco lamp above the dining table, and his closet's stained glass window. Mostly, though, the HDR just subtly makes you more aware of the overwhelming beigeness of everything. Which is, of course, exactly the point.

Similar respect for the source can be seen in the 4K disc's approach to sharpness and detail. For while the image looks more dense and filmic, with clear

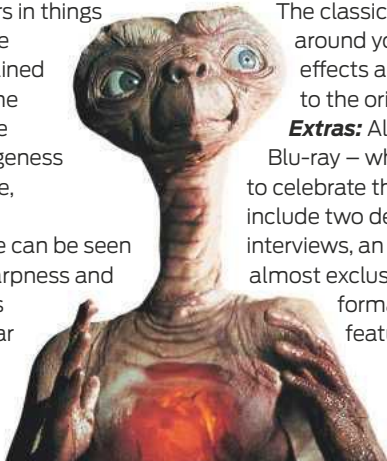


extra textures and detailing, sharpness never seems overcooked. There's still a marginally hazy look. Basically the 4K transfer still looks like *E.T.* has always looked, only better.

**Audio:** This 4K debut is graced with a new DTS:X mix. As with the upgraded picture, this is more about subtle refinement than dynamics and drama.

The classic score sounds seamlessly steered around your array, while dialogue and spot effects are precise and clean. Purists can stick to the original stereo option.

**Extras:** All extras appear on the accompanying Blu-ray – which is the same disc launched in 2012 to celebrate the film's 30th anniversary. These extras include two deleted scenes, various cast and crew interviews, an outstanding 54-minute doc featuring almost exclusively on-set footage, and a more formal 37-minute *Making of...* supported by featurettes on composer John Williams.



Spielberg once planned a sequel about Elliott being kidnapped by evil aliens!

## HCC VERDICT

### E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial

→ Universal Pictures → Ultra HD BD & All-region BD → £25

**WE SAY:** Universal's *E.T.* 4K regrade (and DTS:X mix) is clearly a respectful labour of love.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

**OVERALL:** ★★★★★



# Hammer's yummy Mummy

Can you still call it a Mummy movie if the villain isn't wrapped in bandages?

## → BLOOD FROM THE MUMMY'S TOMB

Hammer's fourth and final Mummy movie dispenses with the bandage-clad baddy altogether in favour of a buxom Egyptian queen preserved in a state of suspended animation as she awaits her rebirth.

The statuesque Valerie Leon (a familiar face from the *Carry On...* films) stars as both the ancient queen Tera and her uncanny double Margaret, who was born at the precise moment her father (Andrew Keir) first discovered Tera's tomb during an archaeological expedition. Years later, when other members of the trip start dying in mysterious circumstances, it looks like the predictions of Tera's rebirth are true – but how does Margaret fit into her evil scheme?

Based on Bram Stoker's 1903 novel *The Jewel of the Seven Stars*, *Blood from the Mummy's Tomb* is an interesting twist on the genre that never quite lives up to its ambitions. Part of this may well be down to the troubled production which saw Peter Cushing leave the film after only a single day due to his wife's illness, and then director Seth Holt passing away from a heart attack a week before the shoot was due to wrap (producer Michael Carreras stepped into the role to complete the production).

However, as messy as *Blood from the Mummy's Tomb* is in places (does anyone believe that the fate of Mark Edwards's character as it appears in the film is anything other than making the most of the material to hand?), it still conjures up a compelling atmosphere of dread that makes it all feel that much more unsettling. Meanwhile, Leon perfectly embodies Hammer's trademark mix of sex and



horror, while also bringing genuine emotional and psychological complexity to her performance.

It's also a damn sight more enjoyable than that recent Tom Cruise movie, too.

**Picture:** While previous DVDs have framed the film at 1.78:1 and 1.85:1 aspect ratios, this Blu-ray presents it at 1.66:1. While this will no doubt lead to all manner of arguments among the online cognoscenti about which is really correct, to our eyes the framing of the Blu-ray looks perfectly acceptable. The restoration itself is also exquisite, revealing plenty of intricate textures and delivering a rich colour palette.

**Audio:** The DTS-HD MA dual-mono soundtrack has been cleaned up beautifully and handles the fairly modest mix of dialogue, Foley effects and Tristram Cary's score with ease.

**Extras:** An 18-minute *Making of...* with Valerie Leon and Hammer experts Jonathan Rigby, Alan Barnes, John J. Johnston and Kevin Lyons. That's your lot.



Valerie Leon shot to fame in a series of late '60s ads for Hai Karate aftershave

## HCC VERDICT

### Blood from the Mummy's Tomb

→ Studiocal → Region B BD & R2 DVD → £23

**WE SAY:** Hammer's confused but enjoyable twist on the Mummy genre cleans up nicely in HD.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

**OVERALL:** ★★★★★

## Scars of Dracula

Studiocal → Region B BD & R2 DVD  
£23



The last of Hammer's period Dracula films, 1970's *Scars of Dracula* may give Christopher Lee more than usual to sink his teeth into in the title role, but even this can't overcome the

film's overly familiar story and restricted budget. Presented in a 1.66:1 aspect ratio, the Blu-ray's 1080p encode has been cleaned up well, although this newfound clarity does tend to draw the eye to some of the less convincing effects (not least that bloody awful rubber bat). Meanwhile, actress Jenny Hanley joins four Hammer experts in looking back on the film's production in the 18-min *Blood Rites...* retrospective featurette.



## Demons of the Mind

Studiocal → Region B BD & R2 DVD  
£23



Incest, murder and madness are the order of the day in Hammer's completely demented 1972 Victorian chiller.

Despite a terribly ripe performance from Robert Hardy as a widowed father who imprisons his two children for fear of what they might do if allowed to run free, *Demons of the Mind* remains a uniquely fascinating and wonderfully grotesque slice of psychological horror. The film's stylish cinematography is well-served by the restored 1.66:1 encode featured on this Blu-ray, while DTS-HD MA dual-mono audio is crystal clear. Extras take the form of a trailer and featurette.



## Fear in the Night

Studiocal → Region B BD & R2 DVD  
£23



With its story about a young newlywed who is repeatedly attacked by a mysterious one-armed assailant,

*Fear in the Night* (1972) often feels like Hammer's attempt at cashing in on the giallo boom. Sadly, the story lacks real bite and, despite fine performances from Judy Geeson and Peter Cushing, comes across as a warm-up for the later *Hammer House of Mystery and Suspense* TV series. This Blu-ray sticks closely to the format of the other Hammer titles covered here, with the restored 1.66:1 presentation of the film joined by a 17-min *Making of...* featurette and the trailer.







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Collecting...

# Michael Bay

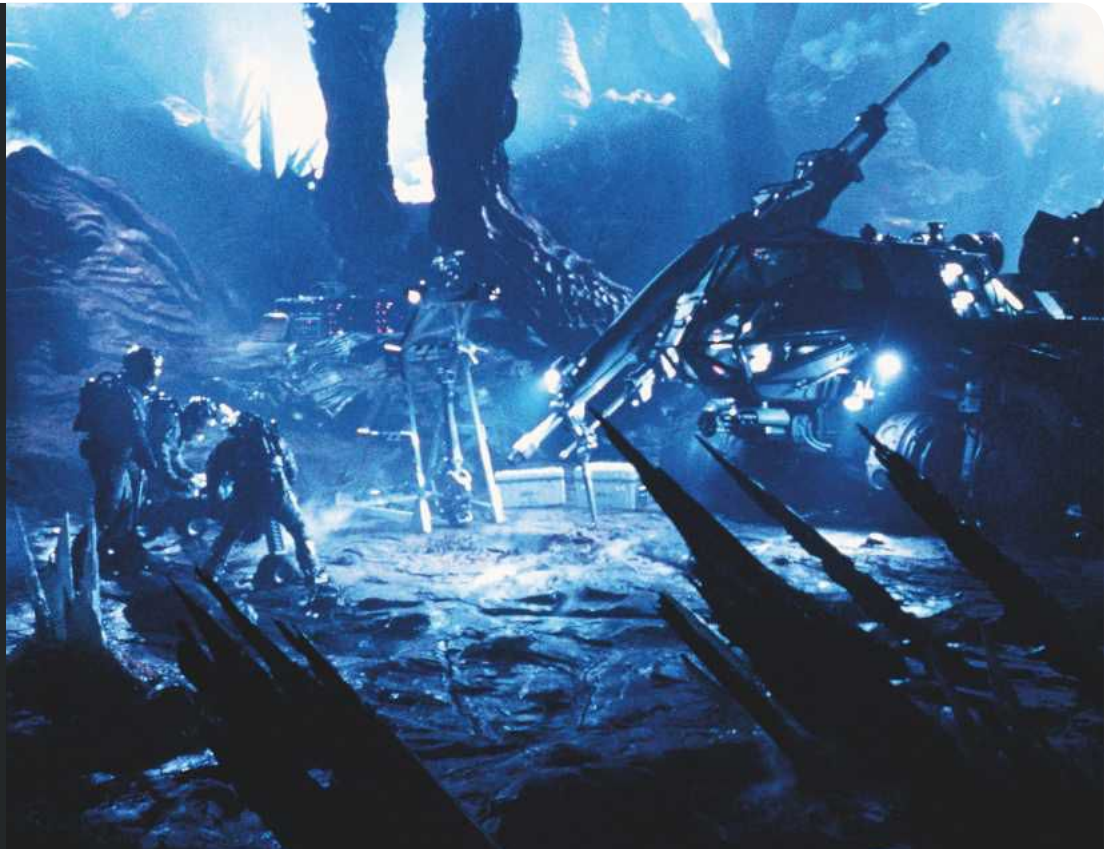


After having our brains pulverised by *Transformers: The Last Knight*, **Team HCC** looks for more of the same from 10 movies from the director/producer/explosion addict

## ARMAGEDDON

With an asteroid the size of Texas on a crash course with the Earth, NASA does the only sensible thing and trains a ragtag bunch of oil drillers in the art of space travel – rather than teaching astronauts how to hold a spanner – in this feel-good 1998 blockbuster. Bruce Willis, Steve Buscemi and Ben Affleck are amongst the wise-cracking cast. Will they save the day? What do you think?

**Get it:** *Armageddon* hit DVD in the format's early years, so it's no surprise to find both the Criterion Collection's double-disc R1 DVD release (spine #40), and the UK R2 *Collector's Edition* laden with extras (chat tracks, deleted scenes, storyboards, etc). When the film landed on Blu-ray in 2010, much of this material was left off except – ironically – the video for soundtrack song *I Don't Want to Miss a Thing*...



## 13 HOURS: THE SECRET SOLDIERS OF BENGHAZI

This 2016 war drama, focusing on the attack on US diplomats/military in Libya four years previously, flopped at the box office – probably rightly so as it's a miss-step from the director, heavy on the artillery fire but lacking any subtlety, humour or insight. Still, if you're just hankering for some bigscreen Bay-hem, then it could hit the spot.

**Get it:** Paramount's stunning BD serves up pristine visuals and room-rattling Atmos audio.



## BAD BOYS II

For this 2003 sequel to his debut movie, Bay ups the running time (to nearly two-and-a-half hours) and the budget (from around \$20m to \$130m). The result is a movie less instantly accessible than *Bad Boys*, but startling in its ambition. It's big and brash, and hurtles from one set-piece to the next.

**Get it:** A curious BD absentee until Sony finally unleashed it in hi-def in 2015. Also available in a double-pack with *Bad Boys*.



## TRANSFORMERS

Shia LaBeouf and Megan Fox are pulled into the eternal battle twixt Autobots and Decepticons in this opening instalment to the money-spinning franchise. Mindless fun, with Bay and VFX houses ILM and Digital Domain pushing CGI to awe-inspiring levels.



**Get it:** While the two-disc BD is the way to go, we'll always have a soft spot for the original 2007 HD DVD release.



## THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE

Bay established a production company in 2001 focused on horror movie reboots, kicking off with this 2003 reimagining of Tobe Hooper's cult classic (and followed by *The Amityville Horror*, *The Hitcher*, *Friday the 13th* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street*). Not a patch on the original, of course, but still an effective horror flick.

**Get it:** The 2009 BD surprises with its extras – Bay features on two of its three chat tracks, and there's a 76-minute *Making of...* too.





## THE ISLAND

Heavily indebted to the likes of *Logan's Run* and *Parts: The Clonus Horror*, Michael Bay's 2005 sci-fi actioner stars Ewan McGregor and Scarlett Johansson as clones who go on the run when they discover the truth about their existence. While the plot is full of holes, Bay keeps things moving fast enough to ensure that you don't really notice until after the end credits roll, while the two leads enjoy some neat character moments between all the pyrotechnics.

**Get it:** Warner's UK BD can only muster a DD 5.1 track, so import Paramount's all-region US disc for a DTS-HD MA 5.1 experience.



## THE ROCK

Nic Cage and Sean Connery head the cast of this brilliant action movie that marks the last collaboration of producers Don Simpson and Jerry Bruckheimer. The story may be a bit out there, but Bay directs with his trademark kinetic energy.

**Get it:** While Disney brought across all of the extras from the Criterion Collection DVD for its US Blu-ray, the superb audio commentary wasn't included on the HD platters released in other territories. Thankfully the US disc was an all-region affair, making importing all the easier.



## TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Michael Bay only produced, rather than directed, the two recent *TMNT* movies, but his fingerprints are all over these spectacle-laden VFX-fests. While the first film took itself far too seriously, this 2016 sequel has much more fun with the setup, coming across like a live-action version of the fan-favourite '80s cartoon series.

**Get it:** Effective use of HDR and a killer Dolby Atmos soundmix make the 4K Blu-ray the release of choice – although 3D fans may wish to spin-up the excellent stereoscopic Blu-ray instead.



## PEARL HARBOR

UK audiences will laugh at the line 'World War 2's just started!' in a film set in 1941, but this three-hour mega-budget romance/war epic has its charms – not least the visceral brilliance of the Pearl Harbor attack sequence.

**Get it:** Oddly, there's only been a single Blu-ray release for *Pearl Harbor* – when it was chosen by Disney as one of its first hi-def outings in 2006. A better package for fans to track down is the four-disc R1 US 'Vista Series' DVD, which offers Bay's director's cut, plus a wealth of extras – including plenty of historical info about the real-life events.

## PAIN & GAIN

Bay broke free from his *Transformers* rut to helm this 2013 true story (sort of...) about criminal body-builders, starring Mark Wahlberg and Dwayne Johnson. This taps a similar vein to *Bad Boys II*, with Bay showcasing his love of excessive violence, off-beat humour and sun-drenched cinematography, but working to a tighter budget. Definitely worth a watch, and Wahlberg is in unsettling form as the gym-addict meathead with his own twisted take on the American Dream.

**Get it:** Paramount's UK Blu-ray is blessed with a stunning, eyeball-searing 1080p encode and muscular Dolby TrueHD 7.1 mix. Unlike US buyers, we didn't have to wait for a second *Special Collector's Edition* re-release to get the extra features, either.

TOP PICK



Have we missed one of your favourite Michael Bay movies?  
Let us know: email [letters@homecinemachoice.com](mailto:letters@homecinemachoice.com)



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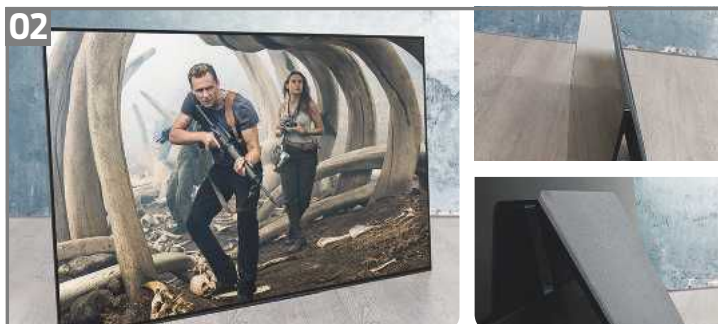
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## TOP 10 Televisions

**Sony KD-65ZD9** → £3,500 ★★★★★

Sony finished 2016 on a high with this full-array LED Bravia (with advanced local dimming tech) that claims a 1,800-nit peak brightness. Cinematic, sublime pictures – and Dolby Vision support is a firmware update away. HCC #267

**Sony KD-55A1** → £3,500 ★★★★★

Another Sony set due a Dolby Vision upgrade later this year, this 55in OLED dazzles with its image quality (including superb motion processing), hidden Acoustic Surface speaker technology and eye-catching styling. HCC #275

**LG OLED65E7**

→ £5,000 ★★★★★

3D playback is dropped, but the E7 offers welcome picture improvements over last year's E6, particularly brightness and near-black talents. Supports Dolby Vision. HCC #274

**Panasonic TX-55EZ952**

→ £2,500 ★★★★★

A 55in OLED TV with an effortlessly naturalistic performance, although not as bright as some rivals. Gorgeous, understated design and premium build quality. HCC #277

**Philips 55POS9002**

→ £2,200 ★★★★★

Philips' second-gen Android-powered OLED takes a more refined approach to its processing, focusing on balanced cinematic imagery. Ambilight, as usual, boosts your immersion. HCC #276

**Samsung UE49MU7000**

→ £1,000 ★★★★★

Not one of Samsung's top-flight TVs, but a cracking mid-range 49in model that presents 4K and HD material with bright, rich colours and stable blacks. Good choice for an affordable setup. HCC #277

**Samsung QE65Q9F**

→ £4,900 ★★★★★

This premium 'QLED' screen outguns rivals when it comes to brightness and visual impact. Routinely stunning, but edge LED lighting has some niggles. Supports Samsung's HDR 10+ format. HCC #273

**Sony KD-55XE8596**

→ £1,100 ★★★★★

A real 4K bargain, combining a 55in screen with a solid picture performance. HDR doesn't zing due to a lack of sheer brightness, but it benefits from backlight stability. Impressive with regular HD, too. HCC #278

**LG 55SJ850V**

→ £1,300 ★★★★★

Backlight distractions hinder this set's performance in low-lit rooms, but it's a strong all-rounder, offering Dolby Vision HDR, WebOS smarts, well-rounded sonics and a bargain price tag. HCC #276

**Hisense H65N6800**

→ £1,000 ★★★★★

Largescreen entertainment at a tempting price. The set has its foibles (most obviously concerning black depth) but succeeds in being big, bright and sharp. Neat styling too, plus solid VOD options. HCC #267

## TOP 5 Blu-ray movies

**The Fate of the Furious**  
[Ultra HD Blu-ray]

The eighth entry to the popular franchise continues the feel of parts 5, 6 and 7, with stunts and punch-ups aplenty. Universal's disc marries Dolby Vision HDR to a largescale soundtrack.

★★★★★

**Alien: Covenant**  
[Ultra HD Blu-ray]

This sequel to a prequel isn't the best of the *Alien* franchise, but still makes for a scary night on your cinema sofa. The 4K disc adds an Atmos audio mix to its assured HDR presentation.

★★★★★

**The Handmaiden**

Park Chan-wook directs this lavish, sensual Korean-language period thriller, which arrives on Blu-ray with gorgeous Theatrical and Extended cuts and accomplished audio. A Q&A with Chan-wook is an extras highlight.

★★★★★

**Wonder Woman**

The highlight so far of the DC Extended Universe gives its heroine plenty of opportunity to shine in its WWI-era origin story, and the BD challenges your speaker setup with a wonderful Dolby Atmos soundtrack.

★★★★★

**Guardians of the Galaxy: Vol. 2**  
[Ultra HD Blu-ray]

Disney's first 4K disc offers reference-grade visuals with expansive contrast and rich colours. The movie is the expected blend of quick wit and explosive set-pieces.

★★★★★



# TOP 10 Blu-rays



## 01 Oppo UDP-203 → £650 ★★★★★

Oppo refreshes its player hardware with a superb universal design with Ultra HD playback (including Dolby Vision via firmware update). Packed with user adjustments and connectivity. No apps or Darbee processing, though. HCC #269



## 02 Oppo UDP-205 → £1,400 ★★★★★

This pricey, peerless UHD deck flaunts universal disc playback, asynchronous USB input, headphone amp and balanced stereo outs amongst its audiophile features. One for musos. HCC #274



## 03 Sony UBP-X800 → £400 ★★★★★

Sony embraces UHD Blu-ray with a full-width, sturdy design that'll also spin DVD-A and SACD platters. A great all-rounder, but no current Dolby Vision support or word on an update. HCC #274



## 04 Panasonic DMP-UB900 → £600 ★★★★★

The Ultra HD Blu-ray format got an inspiring debut in Panasonic's multi-talented deck that offers a sterling picture performance, 4K-enabled VOD apps and analogue audio outs. No DV. HCC #259



## 05 Panasonic DMP-UB700 → £300 ★★★★★

Shorn of some of the audiophile niceties of the UB900 (including multichannel analogue outputs), but still a safe pair of hands with your 4K BDs. And at a bargain price. HCC #270



## 06 Arcam FMJ UDP411 → £1,200 ★★★★★

Pristine visuals – including upscaled SD – and a classy sonic performance grant this Arcam instant appeal. The design and build is commensurate with the premium price tag. HCC #244



## 07 Panasonic DMP-UB300 → £240 ★★★★★

Great 4K imagery from this bargain deck, but you might prefer to up your budget for the UB700 – no split HDMI, optical/coaxial or Wi-Fi connections here. Half-size design for an easy install. HCC #272



## 08 Samsung UBD-K8500 → £270 ★★★★★

Debut Ultra HD Blu-ray player that finds fans courtesy of its sensible price point (now even lower), connected smarts and eye-catching visuals. Build quality is a little uninspiring. HCC #260



## 09 LG BP556 → £85 ★★★★★

LG's top-of-the-line(!) Full HD disc-spinner is actually a budget offering. Design is a bit garish, but the addition of multiroom streaming, some smart apps and file playback sweeten the deal. HCC #266



## 10 Samsung UBD-M9500 → £350 ★★★★★

Second-gen 4K player that adds features (mobile BD streaming, 360-degree image support) but removes 3D playback capability. As before, the chassis is curved. UHD discs look pin-sharp. HCC #275

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# TOP 10 Projectors



## 01 Sony VPL-VW550ES →£9,000 ★★★★★

For its top-range domestic SXRD beamer, Sony introduces an HDR Contrast tool that proves useful in fine-tuning its UHD Blu-ray performance. Excels with standard BD content and setup flexibility, too. *HCC #269*



## 02 JVC DLA-X7000 →£5,700 ★★★★★

With contrast and brightness improvements over the more affordable DLA-X5000, this is a great bigscreen option, although its SDR playback impresses more than HDR. *HCC #259*



## 03 Sony VPL-HW45ES

→£1,850 ★★★★★

The most affordable model in Sony's home cinema range, the Full HD-resolution 45ES features excellent light management for a routinely cinematic image. Great value. *HCC #263*



## 04 Optoma UHD60

→£2,400 ★★★★★

An assured Ultra HD debut from Optoma – the UHD60 presents 4K Blu-rays with a pleasing contrast balance and lush detail. SDR-HDR conversion tool is best avoided, though. *HCC #277*



## 05 Optoma UHD65

→£3,000 ★★★★★

4K DLP model that adds motion processing, enhanced colour response and a theatre-room friendly black chassis over Optoma's UHD60, but commands a more expensive price. *HCC #278*



## 06 Acer V7850

→£2,700 ★★★★★

One rung below Acer's largescale V9800 4K debut sits this more affordable model. Again, black levels aren't its strong point, but this runs bright, sharp and super-quiet. *HCC #276*



## 07 Epson EH-TW6700

→£1,300 ★★★★★

HDR and 4K scaling are off the menu, leaving this mid-range model to concentrate on cinematic HD images. Bright, crisp performance, plenty of tweaks, but no 12V trigger. *HCC #271*



## 08 Epson EH-TW9300

→£3,000 ★★★★★

Epson brings HDR playback and 4K up-rezzing to an agreeable price tag. Colourful and well-contrasted visuals, but don't expect an HDR knockout. *HCC #266*



## 09 Epson EH-TW7300

→£2,200 ★★★★★

Similar performance traits to its bigger EH-TW9300 sibling, but with reductions in max brightness (and claimed contrast). Currently the most affordable HDR model around. *HCC #269*



## 10 BenQ W2000

→£800 ★★★★★

Average black-level performance limits this model's all-round appeal, but elsewhere this Full HD DLP budget PJ catches the eye with its calibration options and detailed visuals. *HCC #257*

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# TOP 10 Speakers



**01** **Monitor Audio Gold 300AV** →£7,150 ★★★★★  
MA revamps its Gold Series and we pay serious attention. This big-ticket package excels across the frequency range, offers exquisite design and packs setup flexibility via the dipole/monopole FX surrounds. *HCC #251*



**02** **Q Acoustics 3000 5.1 Cinema Pack** →£700 ★★★★★  
A superior compact package with driver improvements over the previous 2000i series. The two-way cabinets and dual-driver sub combine to offer impressive audio for the money. *HCC #247*



**03** **KEF R Series 7.1**  
→£6,500 ★★★★★  
A 7.1 set mixing dipolar and direct surrounds, this package takes its cues from KEF's Blade and offers faultless, largescale home cinema sonics. *HCC #217*



**04** **Monitor Audio Bronze B5 AV**  
→£1,500 ★★★★★  
Like their Gold siblings, these feature switchable surround speakers and MA's C-CAM drivers. Smaller in stature and output, but eminently more affordable. *HCC #254*



**05** **ATC HTS7 5.1**  
→£3,500 ★★★★★  
Brit brand ATC rejigs the driver tech and neutral sound of its SCM range into a wall-mountable, flexible system perfect for discreet AV setups. *HCC #275*



**06** **ELAC Debut 5.1.2**  
→£1,950 ★★★★★  
Well-priced floorstanding Atmos system that manages to balance subtlety and precision with an exciting delivery. Subwoofer includes app-based room EQ. *HCC #262*



**07** **DALI Opticon 5.1**  
→£3,200 ★★★★★  
The Opticons employ driver designs from DALI's high-end models, and showcase a talent for involving music presentation and thrilling home cinema. *HCC #260*



**08** **Polk Signature Series 5.1**  
→£1,450 ★★★★★  
Largescale performance from a well-priced floorstanding system with slimmed-down centre enclosure. Upfront and boisterous sound; a great entertainer. *HCC #273*



**09** **Focal Sib Evo Dolby Atmos 5.1.2** →£1,200 ★★★★★  
Enjoyable-sounding and well-priced sub/sat system with Atmos upfiring in front L/R enclosures. Not the smallest 'satellite' speakers around. *HCC #276*



**10** **Wharfedale DX-1SE**  
→£400 ★★★★★  
Delightfully compact 5.1 package (although with two-way satellite speakers) that blends a tidy design with crisp surround sonics at a very tempting price. *HCC #267*

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Photo courtesy of UK Home Cinemas

## TOP 10 AV Receivers/AV Processors

01



### Anthem MRX 1120 → £4,000 ★★★★★

Combining Anthem's superb ARC room EQ system with 11-channel amplification makes this an essential consideration for full-spec Atmos setups. Muscular, precise sound. No networking skills, though. HCC #265

02



### Arcam AVR850 → £4,500 ★★★★★

High-end seven-channel AVR marrying Class G amplification and Atmos (and future DTS:X) support with talented Dirac Live Room EQ. 11-channel pre-outs for full-fat setups. HCC #257

03



### Denon AVR-X4300H

→ £1,300 ★★★★★

Nine-channel receiver with HEOS multiroom integration and 11-channel processing (Atmos, DTS:X, plus Auro-3D as a paid-for upgrade). Great, detailed sound and foolproof usability. HCC #267

04



NEW ENTRY

### Marantz NR1608

→ £600 ★★★★★

With a smoother sound signature than before and the addition of HEOS multiroom, Marantz's 7.1-channel slim-line AVR flies the flag for living-room friendly AV. Only one HDMI out, though. HCC #278

05



### Sony STR-DN1080

→ £550 ★★★★★

Sony is back in the AVR game with a first Atmos model that adds worthy phantom rear speaker processing to its 5.1.2 sonics. A few UI niggles don't take much of the shine off an impressive budget buy. HCC #277

06



### Yamaha RX-A3060

→ £2,000 ★★★★★

New nine-channel flagship from Yamaha features excellent room EQ implementation, well-judged DSP modes, and an even-handed, effortless sound. HCC #264

07



### Denon AVR-X6300H

→ £2,000 ★★★★★

Denon bundles 11 channels of power, plus cutting-edge features, into this crisp, articulate AV receiver. Ideal partner for 7.1.4 setups, but not quite the muscle-monster you might expect. HCC #269

08



### Pioneer VSX-1131

→ £550 ★★★★★

Seven-channel model with Atmos and DTS:X support that features an overhauled remote control and UI to improve usability. Bass-rich, energetic sound. HCC #265

09



### Yamaha RX-A860

→ £900 ★★★★★

Only seven channels and hindered by only three HDCP 2.2-enabled HDMI inputs, but beyond that this flexible MusicCast AVR proves a great listen, with plenty of DSP toys. HCC #270

10



### Denon HEOS AVR

→ £800 ★★★★★

Able to run wireless rears/sub (using HEOS models) and sporting a display-free design, this is a five-channel AVR with a different approach. One for HEOS devotees only. HCC #276

## TOP 5 Bonus features



### Sam Peckinpah: Man of Iron – The Director's Cut

Arrow Video bolsters its *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia*: Limited Edition Blu-ray with over 10 hours of extended interviews shot for Paul Joyce's fascinating TV doc about the film's director. ★★★★★



### Master Class: Ridley Scott

Not as extensive as previous *Making of...* docs accompanying Scott's movies, but this 56-minute feature joining *Alien: Covenant* is well worth a watch, with a strong focus on SFX and creature design. ★★★★★



### Napoleon: Triptych

On a package that also features a remarkable five-hour commentary track, the option to watch the movie's three-panel footage on three displays (via three discs) is the icing on the cake. ★★★★★



### The Wild One and the BBFC

Accompanying the Marlon Brando classic, this 25-minute interview with former BBFC examiner Richard Falcon provides absorbing insight into the movie's original controversy and 14-year UK ban. ★★★★★



### It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World: Extended Cut

Not quite the original theatrical Cinerama version (202 minutes, now lost) but a 198-minute cut put together from numerous sources. A labour of love that varies in image quality. ★★★★★



# TOP 10 Subwoofers



## 01 SVS SB-2000 → £600 ★★★★★

This follow up to the SB-1000 offers immense value for money. A mid-sized woofer that imbibes Blu-rays with quick, taut and potent LFE, it's a perfect introduction to what a truly good sub can accomplish. HCC #233



## 02 REL No.25 → £6,500 ★★★★★

REL celebrates its 25th anniversary in style with this 15in/1,000W premium concoction that exhibits exhilarating speed and nuance down to serious depths. Big, but beautiful. HCC #271



## 03 Bowers & Wilkins DB1D

→ £3,750 ★★★★★

This sequel to the DB1 moves EQ to an app and changes driver/amp design. Beautifully controlled performance with depth and detail. Gorgeous bodywork. HCC #277



## 04 JL Audio Fathom f212v2

→ £6,500 ★★★★★

A second outing for JL's 2 x 12in monster, with an increase in power (3,600W) and room EQ improvements among the changes. Sounds as good as you'd imagine. HCC #261



## 05 SVS SB16-Ultra

→ £2,500 ★★★★★

A 16in driver and 1,500W amp combine to give SVS's flagship sealed sub real appeal. Goes low but remains tight and fast. App-assisted EQ and operation. HCC #270



## 06 REL T7i

→ £850 ★★★★★

Easy to house 8in sub (with 10in passive driver). Decent LF extension joined by superb speed. Wireless transmission via optional (£200) system. HCC #277



## 07 BK Electronics P12-300SB-DF

→ £475 ★★★★★

Bass heads can get outrageous value for money in the shape of BK's overperforming 12in sub. A front-firing model is also offered. HCC #247



## 08 Eclipse TD520SW

→ £3,000 ★★★★★

This twin 8in woofer, driven by ICEpower amplification, aims for ultimate speed and tone – and succeeds. Worth every penny of its asking price. HCC #249



## 09 GoldenEar SuperSub X

→ £1,450 ★★★★★

Four drivers squeezed into a relatively compact design and given plenty of push from a 1,400W amp. Standout traits are impact and depth. HCC #272



## 10 SVS PC-2000

→ £800 ★★★★★

Cylinder construction means this 12in, 500W design can boast a large cabinet but a relatively small footprint. Good value with weighty, slamming bass. HCC #267

# TOP 5 Console games



## Uncharted: Lost Legacy

The Drake brothers are replaced by two new heroines in the latest instalment of Sony's PlayStation puzzler. The open-world element hides the relatively short nature of its story mode; HDR visuals are stunning.

★★★★★



## Resident Evil 7: Biohazard

Moving from the familiar third-person perspective to a first-person view was always going to be a risk, but it pays off here with a terrifying return to the series' roots. PS4 Pro owners get enhanced resolution visuals.

★★★★★



## Prey

Bethesda's FPS (and reboot of the popular 2006 title) refreshes the genre with inanimate-object-mimicking monsters, and offers plenty of gameplay variety. Good-looking, but 4K is limited to PC-based setups.

★★★★★



## Horizon Zero Dawn

Tomb Raider meets Zelda in this PS4-exclusive action-adventure pitting humans against massive mechanical beasts. Excellent gameplay, and the 4K visuals are perhaps the best reason yet to upgrade to a PS4 Pro.

★★★★★



## Injustice 2

Brilliant follow up to the 2013 superhero beat-'em-up classic, letting you dole out a good kicking to the bad guys while playing as DC Comics legends. Advanced resolution via PS4, plus HDR, too.

★★★★★

## TOP 10 Accessories



### 01 KEF R50 → £600 ★★★★★

KEF's Dolby Atmos-enabled reflective modules are a smart choice to beef up a system. Using the company's Uni-Q point source drivers pays dividends, enabling full-range sonics that reach deep into your cinema room. First-rate build. *HCC #252*



03

### Amazon Echo Dot

→ £50 ★★★★★

Less impressive as a standalone speaker than its larger sibling, but a third of the price, and its 3.5mm output lets it work with third-party kit. Fun AI experience. A real bargain. *HCC #269*

04

### Nvidia Shield Android TV

→ £180 ★★★★★

The Android-based streamer/gaming box gets a gentle revamp – same silicon, neater design, new features including future support for Google Assistant. Slick and easy to use. *HCC #272*

05

### Amazon Fire TV

→ £80 ★★★★★

Media streamer with impressive search functionality and plenty of content, including 4K Netflix and Amazon Video. HDR support would be nice, though. *HCC #270*

06

### Logitech Harmony Elite

→ £270 ★★★★★

Flexible and relatively easy to set up, this all-in-one remote package combines touchscreen handset and hub with smart device app. Worthwhile if you have a stacked kit rack. *HCC #256*



### 07 Devolo Wi-Fi ac Repeater

→ £50 ★★★★★

Simple plug-based add-on that extends the range of your Wi-Fi network, and offers hardwired access. Could be just the ticket for your loft-based movie room. *HCC #269*



### 08 Naim Uniti Atom

→ £1,900 ★★★★★

Naim's gorgeous Uniti Atom combines DAC, 2 x 40W amp and network/wireless streaming for an audiophile hub. Get this HDMI upgrade model to add your flatscreen TV to the action. *HCC #278*



### 09 PSB Imagine XA

→ £350 ★★★★★

These two-way Dolby Atmos-enabled upfiring speakers are fairly chunky, but work well at creating a height layer and the £350-per-pair ticket makes them an enticing option. *HCC #264*



### 10 DVDO iScan Mini

→ £275 ★★★★★

HDMI 4K upscaler (using Silicon Image's VRS processing) that teases sharpness from HD and SD sources. A good fit for an entry-level or mid-range 4K TV. *HCC #264*

## TOP 5 Blu-ray/DVD boxsets



### American Gods: Complete Season One

Adapted from Neil Gaiman's 2001 fantasy novel, this US series hits the ground running with a wonderfully weird and eye-catching first batch of eight episodes. Addictive stuff. ★★★★★



### Doctor Who: The Power of the Daleks

Unseen since 1966, this missing BBC serial has been recreated using animation – with the choice of colour or black-and-white incarnations – and packs a TARDIS-load of extras. ★★★★★



### Vikings: Season 4 – Volume 2

The fourth season of this delicious Dark Age drama closes out in style, and this three-disc set boosts the appeal with rampaging DTS-HD MA 5.1 mixes and informative extras. ★★★★★



### The 4 Marx Brothers at Paramount (1929-1933)

Five classic comedies from the family troupe get the deluxe treatment – new 1080p transfers from 4K restorations, oodles of bonus goodies – on a pleasing three-disc set. ★★★★★



### Ash vs Evil Dead: Season Two

Maniacal spin-off series impresses with its hectic Dolby TrueHD 7.1 mixes, digitally-shot HD encodes and expert mix of horror and gags. Six of the 10 episodes get a chat track. ★★★★★



## TOP 10 Soundbars & Soundbases



**01 Yamaha YSP-5600SW** →£1,900 ★★★★★  
With its 46 drivers (including upfiring) this premium 'bar delivers precisely-steered and immersive audio, even of the Atmos variety. Potent wireless sub and 4K-capable HDMI switching sweeten the high-end deal. HCC #254



**02 Canton DM55** →£330 ★★★★★  
Canton's smallest soundbase still delivers big sonic thrills. Twin woofers underpin clean and crisp mids and highs, and build quality is first-rate. Doddle to use. Bluetooth built-in. HCC #260



**03 Samsung HW-K950** →£1,300 ★★★★★  
Soundbar with additional wireless rears and Dolby Atmos support via four upfiring drivers. Impressively largescale performance, good connectivity. No native DTS support. HCC #263



**04 Samsung HW-MS750 / SWA-W700** →£700/£600 ★★★★★  
Upfiring drivers on this premium 'bar, but no Atmos decoding. Performance still dazzles, and the optional sub shows its merits with movie soundmixes. HCC #278



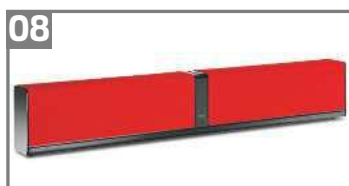
**05 Sony HT-ST5000** →£1,500 ★★★★★  
High-end Dolby Atmos-capable soundbar/sub. Upfiring elevate the soundstage (but don't wraparound). Sound quality overall is excellent, blending muscle and depth with musicality. HCC #275



**06 Cabasse Stream BAR** →£850 ★★★★★  
Soundbar/hi-res speaker that's blessed with real musicality, but doesn't fall short when it comes to energetic film soundtracks. HDMI in/out, but v1.4 only. HCC #269



**07 Q Acoustics M3** →£300 ★★★★★  
A 4in x 6in woofer is tucked away in the M3's eye-catching angular chassis, ensuring this well-priced soundbar has a full-range performance. Simple to use. Bluetooth streaming. HCC #271



**08 DALI Kubik One** →£800 ★★★★★  
The Danish speaker brand brings a slice of glamour to your setup with this stylish soundbar. No HDMI or digital decoding but it packs a tight, lively and nuanced sound. HCC #269



**09 Sonos Playbase** →£700 ★★★★★  
Although this features the same foibles as the Sonos Playbar (no Bluetooth, no HDMI, no DTS), this multiroom maestro looks good and sounds good. Detailed, with naturalistic bass. HCC #273



**10 LG SJ9** →£1,000 ★★★★★  
While Dolby Atmos compatible (with dual upfiring drivers), LG's premium bar/sub combi leaves a greater impression with its fulsome delivery and good connectivity. HCC #274

## TOP 5 Back-catalogue Blu-rays



**Ronin**  
One of Hollywood's greatest car-chase flicks (buoyed by a cast including Robert De Niro and Jean Reno) gets a pristine new 1080p image courtesy of a 4K scan. Arrow Video has rustled up some good bonus bits, too. ★★★★★



**The Fabulous Baron Munchausen**  
Karel Zeman's 1962 mix of live-action and highly stylised animation looks ravishing on Second Sight's welcome BD release, and fans of this fantasy film will dig the extras. ★★★★★



**The Graduate: 50th Anniversary Edition**  
Dustin Hoffman's breakout movie enjoys a new encode based on a 4K master, and director-approved DTS-HD MA 5.1 track, on this celebratory Blu-ray re-release. Packed with extras. ★★★★★



**King Kong [Ultra HD Blu-ray]**  
The big ape looks beautiful on this HDR upgrade of Peter Jackson's 2005 epic, while audio moves from DTS-HD 5.1 to DTS:X for an expansive experience. Heaps of bonus material. ★★★★★



**Dredd [Ultra HD Blu-ray]**  
This brutal comic adaptation gets a new lease of life, not only with improved 4K/HDR imagery but with an Atmos soundmix that ramps up the mayhem. The 1080p platter contains extras and the 3D version. Bargain. ★★★★★

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## TOP 5 PVRs



### Virgin Media TiVo, £subscription

This triple-tuner PVR offers recording flexibility, useful features – you can undelete deleted shows! – and smart TiVo functionality. If you're in a cable area, consider it

★★★★★



### Sky Q, £subscription

Sky's new top-tier product offering dazzles with its image-rich user interface, wireless multiroom skills and recording flexibility delivered by the PVR's 12 tuners. Now supports 4K content

★★★★★



### Humax HDR-1100S, £190

Freesat Freetime PVR that impresses with its usability, VOD options and form factor – Humax's small, white box will slot into any kit rack. We tested the 500GB version – 1TB and 2TB models are also available

★★★★★



### Humax DTR-T4000, £subscription

This YouView-based PVR is required to get BT Sport's new Ultra HD channel – available to those with BT fast fibre and a BT TV sub. Easy to use and with 1TB of storage

★★★★★



### EE TV Smart Box £subscription

This quad-tuner 1TB PVR, from the mobile/broadband corp, offers innovative Replay 24-hour channel recording and great Smart device streaming. Needs more catch-up though

★★★★★

## TOP 5 Headphones



### Sony MDR-HW700DS, £800

Comfy cans supplied with an HDMI surround processor, enabling multichannel audio to be fed to a virtual 9.1-channel soundstage. The effect is superb – great for late-night listening

★★★★★



### Sony MDR-1000X, £360

Superior noise-cancelling cans with hi-res audio support via Sony's LDAC wireless transmission tech. Slick, touch-sensitive operation and healthy battery life. Fulsome sound and comfy to wear

★★★★★



### 1More MK802, £150

Ignore the bling-tastic blue or red finishes and focus on the assured sound performance from these well-priced closed-back cans. Features include wireless Bluetooth and app control (with burn-in mode). Great value

★★★★★



### PSB M4U1, £220

Aimed at both home and on-the-move use (and supplied with a carry case and two cable options), the M4U1s offer solid bass response and impactful highs. Build quality is good, as is comfort

★★★★★



### Audio Technica ATH-SR9, £400

45mm drivers and Audio Technica's Midpoint Mount tech deliver wide, deep, spacious sonics. Memory foam padding aids listener comfort; 3m cable should suit most AV setups.

★★★★★

## TOP 5 Wireless speakers



### KEF Muo, £300

Portable Bluetooth speaker that's a cut above much of the competition. KEF's sonic knowhow results in a punchy, dynamic presentation that cherishes lossless rips. Excellent build quality

★★★★★



### Sony SRS-X11, £60

An affordable palm-sized Bluetooth speaker with internal rechargeable battery, Sony's SRS-X11 is supremely portable and sounds decent for the money. A neat little gizmo. Get two and they can work in stereo

★★★★★



### Q Acoustics BT3, £280

Bluetooth stereo pair with optical input makes a good alternative to a soundbar (there's even a subwoofer pre-out) while remaining a dab hand at music. Neat and tidy design, good price

★★★★★



### Simple Audio Listen, £400

Desktop stereo speakers with Bluetooth support, these benefit from separate tweeter/midbass units and a classy construction. Performance is well-balanced, and a subwoofer output is offered for extra bass

★★★★★



### Denon HEOS 5 HS2, £350

The mid-range multiroom speaker gets a second-gen revamp, adding welcome hi-res audio playback and Bluetooth connectivity. Gorgeous looks, boisterous, room-filling sound

★★★★★

# HOME CINEMA

Choice

## → IN THE NEXT ISSUE

**Pro cinema** Stunning 4K/Atmos install  
**Jingle all the AV way** System add-ons and movie merch to stick in your Christmas stocking  
**Jailhouse rock** *Brawl in Cell Block 99* director talks action, Arnie and shooting on digital

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CONTENTS SUBJECT TO CHANGE – BUT ONLY FOR THE BETTER



# AV Avenger

Technology has gone Back To The Future and it feels so good, says a wistful **Steve May** – although some legacy hardware is probably left alone

**WHAT WAS ONCE** old and forgotten is now new and desirable. Retro is contemporary, while obsolete is on point.

The latest idea to bubble back up is AIBO. Sony's robot pet, which was dismantled 12 years ago when the money-losing corporation was haemorrhaging more red than *Ash Vs The Evil Dead*, is getting a reprieve. A development team, including original AIBO engineers, has been assembled to reboot the project. We shouldn't be surprised. Sony CEO Kaz Hirai teased a renewed interest in robotics at the last CES, and the biggest trend in consumer electronics right now is AI. The two go hand in paw.

It's difficult to believe that AIBO first appeared in 1999. It ran a pre-internet OS, with software supplied on pink AIBOware memory sticks. With Sony's expertise in sensor development, empowered by cloud computing, IoT connectivity and speech recognition, tomorrow's AIBO could be so much more.

It seems we have an insatiable appetite for retro tech. Nintendo's hottest games console this year isn't the Switch, but the SNES Classic Mini. Good luck if you can find one. It's in desperately short supply, and sells out whenever a new container lands. The Mini is a perfect facsimile of the original SNES, albeit small enough to hold in your hand. It has an HDMI output and comes preloaded with 20 SNES games. It's also as cute as a button.

## Play it again

Perhaps the success of vinyl is to blame for this *Back to the Future* boom. Against all the odds, this outdated format has rediscovered its groove. Not only has it seen off clearly superior sonic rivals (SACD, DVD-A), it's become the epitome of hipster home entertainment. There's been some evolution

en route, what with integrated phono-stages and USB outputs, but fundamentally the form factor hasn't changed. Yet it's thriving and relevant. The Big Sleeve release of *Guardians of The Galaxy Vol 2* doesn't just feature a Blu-ray, DVD and collectable art cards, it comes with a 12-inch vinyl album too. That's about as cool as it gets in my book.

Of course, for tech to successfully time travel it has to be economic to reproduce. If what was once space age can be replicated with a few chips and inexpensive solid-state storage, it's halfway to becoming a winner.

I'd like to think LaserDisc is just a Kickstarter campaign away from a resurgence. The format still has a vocal fan base, and LaserDiscs hold the same aesthetic appeal as vinyl. Quite whether there are any pressing plants left able to actually make analogue video platters remains to be seen. Getting a production line up and running might involve rummaging around the skips in Shenzhen.

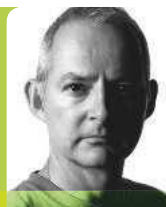
I can confidently predict that we will never see the return of the VCR, though. **Breeding new robot dogs is one thing, rebooting VHS is something else.** Video recorders were, in case you've forgotten, insanely complex pieces of kit. It's miraculous they were mass-produced in the first place.

And if I really want to relive the halcyon days of tape I only have to go up into the loft. Both my JVC D-VHS and Sony C7 still work. I could sate my retro desires by setting a timer recording for next week's episode of *The Apprentice*.

I could, but I won't. The original Atari VCS games console is getting a re-release, and it's much more important that I get my preorder in ■

*Do you use retro AV hardware in your setup?  
Let us know: email [letters@homecinemachoice.com](mailto:letters@homecinemachoice.com)*

**Steve May** is so desperate to get his hands on a Nintendo SNES Classic Mini he's agreed to dress like Super Mario for the next 12 months







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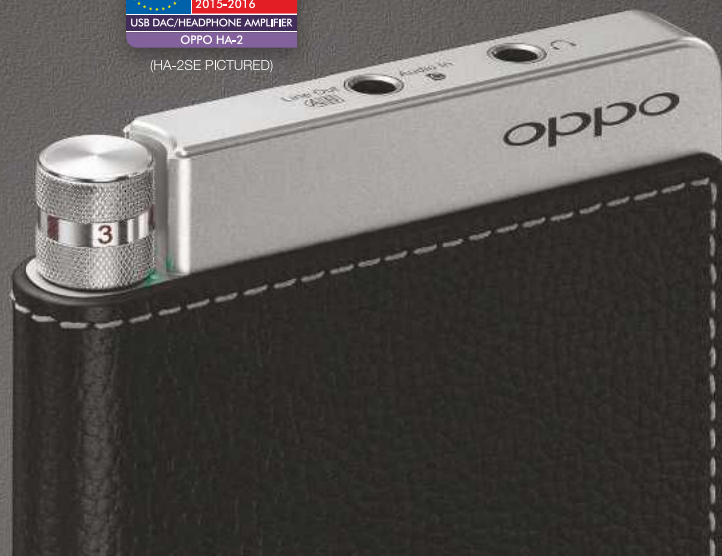


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